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Europa League

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EDGE

2009

1960

1980

1930

CONTENTS

September 2009

THE MORE things change the more they stay the same. This season, the UEFA Cup has mutated into the Europa League and the Champions League has been reorganised to guarantee more places for middle-ranking countries.

Blink and you will have missed it.

The leading contenders to win the Champions League are fast becoming an unbreakable cartel but there are still plenty of new faces this season. AZ Alkmaar (Holland), Rubin Kazan (Russia), Standard Liege (Belgium), Urziceni (Romania) and Wolfsburg (Germany) will all be competing in the group stages for the first time.

We have given all the teams equal coverage in our guide, starting on page 48. Because of our deadlines, we have included all the teams who took part in the final qualifying round.

At the draws for both competitions there will be inevitable talk of a European superleague. A superleague exists already, of course, in the form of the current Champions League. The issue that divides people is who gets to play in such a league – and how they divide up the TV spoils.

Therein lies the greatest irony of Michel Platini's short but so far impressive stewardship of UEFA. He has delivered more places for smaller countries, but the TV prize money is still gobbled up by the richest leagues. And the gap between rich and poor gets larger every year.

As with last year's well-received Euro Cups issue, we have increased the cover price to pay for extra pages. Again, though, subscribers get their copy at no extra cost.

GAVIN HAMILTON, Editor
gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com

CONTRIBUTORS

New South America correspondent Rex Gowar recently returned to Buenos Aires after many years in London working for Reuters

COVER STORY

2009-10 EURO CLUB GUIDE
The expert guide to the 2009-10 UEFA competitions

50 **Champions League** From Anderlecht to Zurich: the 42 fourth qualifying round contenders and group stage qualifiers

71 **Europa League** From AEK Athens to Zilina: the 76 clubs in contention for the group stage

THE WORLD THIS MONTH

4 **...in pictures** the global game caught on camera

8 **Brian Glanville** on the life of Bobby Robson and the emergence of Jack Wilshere

11 **Paul Gardner** on the curious case of Adrian Mutu vs Chelsea FC

12 **Jim Holden** asks if the real Zlatan Ibrahimovic will now stand up?

HEADLINERS

16 **People in the news** Samuel Eto'o and Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Adrian Mutu, Daniel Jarque, Michael Ballack

INSIDE FOOTBALL

20 **Keir Radnedge** on FIFA's problem with South American administrators

DISPATCHES

24 **The big stories from our correspondents** Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Mexico, USA, Spain, Scotland, Aland Islands, Chile, Germany, Portugal, Bahrain, South Africa, Russia, Switzerland

SIX OF THE BEST

92 **Libertadores stars**

FACE TO FACE

94 Former England manager **Glenn Hoddle**

96 Thailand coach **Peter Reid**, Seattle Sounders' **Freddie Ljungberg**, Bayern Munich's **Anatoliy Tymoshchuk**

WORLD CUP COUNTDOWN

98 Men who matter: **Ahn Young-hak, Neven Subotic**

TALENT SCOUT

100 **Tomorrow's stars today** Louis Angelo Pena, Gabriel Obertan

MEMORIES

102 **Cruyff and Beckenbauer** The rivalry between the two biggest players of the 1970s

SOCCER CITIES

106 **Budapest** Stadiums, history, what to see

WORLD SERVICE

115 **The ultimate global news and results section**
Internationals results
Digest Gold Cup, European Cup preliminary rounds, Asian Champions League
Preview Croatia, Poland, Ukraine, Albania, Slovenia
Club football results from Europe, South America, North & Central America, Africa, Asia

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

138 **Who said what** and why

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...IN PICTURES

The global game caught on camera

Rest in peace...Espanyol fans gather at their new stadium to pay tribute to captain Dani Jarque who died of a heart attack after a training session

21
E BARCELONA
ESPANYOL
R.D.ESPANYOL
DE BARCELONA
FINAL 2007
REAL CLUB

Ouch!...Austria's Franz Schiemer misses the ball but gets his man, Cameroon's Daniel Ngom

Heading off...LA Galaxy's David Beckham leaves the pitch after his red card against Seattle Sounders

Cover up...Guingamp's defensive wall are taking no chances against Bordeaux

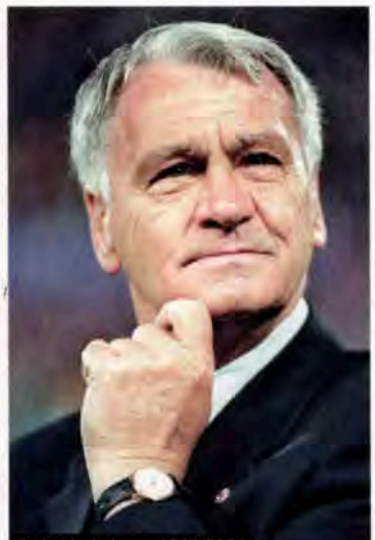
Up in the Gods...Chelsea and Club America fans get a bird's eye view during their pre-season friendly at Dallas Cowboys Stadium in Texas

Armed and dangerous...Honduran police frisk fans before the World Cup qualifier against Costa Rica at the Olimpic stadium in San Pedro Sula

Aussie no rules...Shane Smeltz of Gold Coast United finds himself held in a headlock by Brisbane Roar's Bob Malcolm

Brian Glanville

...remembers the life of Bobby Robson...and says England should seize the opportunity offered by Jack Wilshere



Sir Bobby Robson...1933-2009

DE MORTUIS nil nisi bonum, said the ancient Romans. Speak nothing but good of the dead. So it largely was with the cruel death from the so bravely resisted cancer of Bobby Robson. Indeed, a sceptical young football journalist remarked to me that Bobby had had "the Princess Di treatment".

There was, of course, much to admire. His excellence as a player, one of the cream of the crop in his boyhood years, when Fulham were so lucky to sign him from the north east, as many bigger clubs were after him, while Middlesbrough, in their folly, had let him slip through their hands.

At Craven Cottage, Robson struck up a famous partnership with Johnny Haynes, a player he revered, though it was not until he joined West Bromwich Albion that he would become an England international, capped 20 times between 1957 and 1962.

As a manager, Bobby had 13 impressive years with Ipswich Town, where he showed not only managerial competence but, on at least two occasions, physical courage.

The first came soon after he took over in 1969. Things were going wrong – the halcyon days of Alf Ramsey's reign seemed very distant – and when the team lost at home, it emerged that a bunch of dropped players were celebrating the defeat. Robson burst in on them and knocked down the ringleader, Billy Baxter.

Years later, there was the notorious UEFA Cup match against Lazio in Rome. The first leg had been bad enough. David Johnson, the Ipswich centre-forward, had been kicked in the penis by the Lazio centre-half and had endured a horribly painful operation. When it came to the return at the Stadio Olimpico, the Lazio subs sitting in the dugout would pat their groins as poor Johnson ran past. Lazio violently assailed the Ipswich players and, at the end of the game, in the players' tunnel, Giuseppe Wilson, the half-English Lazio captain, knocked down the Ipswich keeper, David Best, and began kicking him before Bobby Robson hauled Wilson away.

There were two distinct phases in his Ipswich regime. In the first, Ipswich were essentially a long-ball team, but more than good enough to beat Arsenal 1-0 in the FA Cup Final of 1978. But Robson had the courage to change to a more measured style, featuring two gifted Dutch midfielders: Arnold Muhren and Frans Thijssen. In Robson's last two seasons at Ipswich, they twice finished second in the league and won the UEFA Cup.

Yet not long after he became manager of England, in 1982, he seemed to come under the dreaded influence of "Long Ball" Charlie Hughes, then running the FA coaching scheme. These resurrected, essentially primitive, tactics were imposed on the England youth team, and there seemed a real danger they would be adopted by the full national side. Robson and Hughes denied any such plans, and these methods were never inflicted on the main team. But there had seemed a real threat.

"Arguably, he was better suited to club rather than international management"

Robson continued to live in Ipswich, as indeed did Alf Ramsey, an embittered man after his dismissal from the England then the Birmingham City managerial roles. Absurdly and woundingly, not only would he have nothing to do with Bobby, though they lived only a few streets from each other, but to Robson's dismay he even attacked his stewardship of England.

Curiously inconsistent

Robson's reign as England manager, over an eight-year period, was curiously inconsistent. It began very badly indeed when an ill-assembled team of revenants was immensely lucky to get a draw against Denmark in Copenhagen then, losing the Wembley return on a penalty, failing to qualify for the European Championship. He did, however, guide England to the World Cup finals of 1986 in Mexico, and there we had the curious case of Bryan Robson's shoulder.

It had already been dislocated in England, and when Mexico were beaten 3-0 in a friendly in Los Angeles, en route to the World Cup, out it went again. Only for Bobby Robson to deny that it had. In due course he admitted he had told "a white lie", but he deployed Bryan in both England's dire opening games, defeat in Monterrey by Portugal and a shaky 0-0 draw with Morocco, when Bryan was forced off again and Ray Wilkins was sent off for throwing the ball at the referee. Forced to rebuild the team, Bobby saw it improve and reach the quarter-finals where, as we know all too well, it was undone by Diego Maradona's notorious Hand of God goal.

No shame in that, but abundant shame in England's three inept performances in West Germany, in the finals of the European Championship of 1988, pitiful losses to Ireland, Holland and the USSR. The England team was accused by Fabio Capello, holding a watching brief, as being without *rabbia*, its traditional "rage".

Another former Italy star, Sandro Mazzola, said there could be nowhere to go with Robson. But Robson survived and qualified his team for another World Cup, in Italy in 1990, even coming round to extolling the

So close...Robson and his coaching staff at the 1990 World Cup semi-final

most creative English player of his era, Glenn Hoddle, whom just before leaving for a pre-World Cup tournament in Mexico in 1985, Robson had stuck out on the right flank against Scotland in Glasgow.

In Mexico City the other players contrived to move Hoddle into the middle. By the time it came to the pre-World Cup 1986 training camp, Robson had suddenly been converted. Never, he proclaimed, had he thought to see an English playmaker to match Haynes, but Hoddle was it. One wrote at the time that it was interesting to see that The Road to Damascus ran through Colorado Springs.

When Bobby died, Hoddle himself was lavish with his compliments. So, tearfully, was Paul Gascoigne, himself the refulgent playmaker of his time. Yet Robson had kept him at arm's length for most of the pre-1990 World Cup season using him on the left wing for England B in Brighton, putting huge pressure on him (his last chance) before he played against the Czechs at Wembley in May 1990. So much so that Gazza was restlessly kicking a ball against the tunnel wall before he went out to excel. As indeed he did in Italy.

Press relations at that World Cup were virtually non-existent, though a naive Bobby gave the run of the England hotels to a novelist called Pete Davies who was writing a book which would contain indiscretions few professional football journalists would have committed.

"Pressure?" Bobby once remarked at a press conference in Mexico City. "There isn't any pressure. You people provide the pressure. If you people didn't exist, my life would be twice as easy and twice as pleasurable."

When it came to the 1990 World Cup in Italy, the stand-off between Bobby, his squad and the press was absolute; this because both Robsons felt they had been unfairly maligned over what might loosely be called their romantic lives. The football press had nothing to do with such "revelations".

Bobby would go on to work with PSV, Sporting Lisbon, Porto and Barcelona. His latter years with Newcastle United were laudable, regenerating a team which had been largely demoralised by Ruud Gullit, and taking them into the top five on three occasions. Arguably, he was better suited to club rather than international management, with its peculiar pressures. Yet few could have operated so successfully, when time and again afflicted by cancer. ●

FABIO CAPELLO has actually publicly talked of the dazzling, precociously gifted, supremely confident Jack Wilshere of Arsenal as a prospect for the coming World Cup.

Wilshere has splendid ball control and doesn't hesitate to juggle his way past defenders. He has pace, he knows when and how to lay a ball off, and I see no reason why he shouldn't go right into an England team dismally lacking in flair – with the shining exception of Wayne Rooney.

Too young? Well, Pele was playing for Brazil at 16, while Diego Maradona was an Argentina international in his teens and would surely have flourished in the 1978 World Cup had his mentor, Cesar Luis (*El Flaco*) Menotti, surprisingly and over cautiously decided not to put him in the squad.

Potential...Wilshere

GOALS
WE'D LIKE TO SEE AGAIN...

Long range...Lopez

1 Claudio Lopez, Kansas City Wizards v LA Galaxy
Remember David Beckham's goal against Wimbledon from the halfway line in 1996? Lopez did the same thing

2 Magne Hoseth, Molde v Rosenborg
A swerving left-foot volley from out of nowhere that gave the Rosenborg keeper no chance

Thunderbolt...Vanna

3 Tonis Vanna, Flora Tallinn v Brondby
A right-foot drive from more than 40 yards

4 Emir Bajrami, Elfsborg v Djurgarden
Another mirrored goal as Bajrami hits a left-footer which is almost identical to Marco Van Basten's wonder strike for Holland against the Soviet Union in the European Championship Final in 1988

Curling volley...Donovan

5 Landon Donovan, LA Galaxy v New England Revolution
Great technique to curl a left-footed volley into the far corner of the net

6 Wendel, Bordeaux v Lens
The Brazilian winger checks back to shake off a defender before he curls an exquisite shot into the top corner

AND ONE TO FORGET...

Ismail Aissati, Ajax v Benfica
An attempted back-pass that sails over the Ajax keeper's head and into his own net

To see clips of these goals, visit www.worldsoccer.com

NUMBERS GAME

£215 million
record-breaking figure spent by Real Madrid on new players this summer

93,137
people in the crowd to watch LA Galaxy play Barcelona in a friendly in Pasadena – the largest attendance at a game in the US since the 1994 World Cup Final

€384.8 million
revenue for European champions Barcelona last season, up from €333.8m for the previous campaign

10
years before a European league will be up and running, according to Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger

120,000
free tickets being given to South African fans by World Cup organisers

7
goals in the early-season Dutch league encounter between Ajax and PSV, won 4-3 by the Eindhoven side

20
league goals Manchester United manager Alex Ferguson expects Wayne Rooney to score in 2009-10

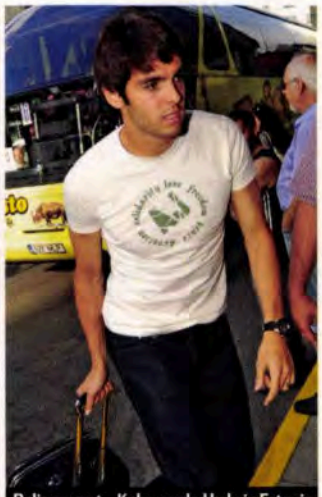
12
successive league wins for Bordeaux following their victory over Lens, creating a new Ligue 1 record

REPORTS we couldn't make up

EXCESS SILVERWARE
Is this football's biggest trophy? Sevilla players had a tough pre-season workout after they won the Ramon De Carranza pre-season tournament in Cadiz.

The annual competition is organised by Cadiz in memory of their former president of the same name.

Big cup shock...Sevilla have got their hands full


Police escort...Kaka needed help in Estonia

LOST AND FOUND
Kaka may have found his way to Madrid this summer but he got lost walking around Tallinn when Brazil visited the Estonian capital for a friendly.

The Real Madrid midfielder took an early morning stroll around the old town on his own and was spotted by two policemen who stopped to talk to the superstar.

On learning that Kaka had lost his way back to his hotel, the officers drove him there in their patrol car.

RUMOURS we'd like to believe

- Barcelona's first offer for Zlatan Ibrahimovic was Samuel Eto'o plus £8.5million. The next offer involved quite a jump – to £40m plus the Cameroon striker.
- Arsenal's bid for Bordeaux's Moroccan striker Marouane Chamakh was scuppered when the French champions demanded that the Gunners' defender Mickael Silvestre be included in the deal.
- Wolfsburg will pay Newcastle United a further £1.7m if the German champions' new recruit, striker Obafemi Martins, helps them to a Champions League qualifying spot this season.
- Veteran Roma defender Christian Panucci shook hands earlier this summer with Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani on a deal to take him back to the San Siro, only for the latter to renege on the agreement. Panucci eventually signed for Parma.
- When Real Madrid's negotiations with Valencia for David Villa broke down, the first reaction of Florentino Perez and Jorge Valdano was to make moves for an Atletico Madrid front man: either Diego Forlan or Sergio Aguero. Only when Atletico turned them down flat did they turn their attention to Lyon's Karim Benzema.

Parma man...new signing Panucci

Paul Gardner

The strange case of Adrian Mutu vs Chelsea FC

REGARDLESS OF the parties involved – or, for that matter, of the subject matter of the dispute – Fiorentina striker Adrian Mutu's dispute with his former employers, Chelsea, intrigues me.

We're dealing with a legal matter here, so let's use the legal title: Adrian Mutu vs Chelsea Football Club Limited. It's a case of a footballer battling against a football club (see Headliners, page17) – one of the richest clubs in the world, as it happens – and it is a situation that immediately raises a highly troubling issue: namely, the relationship of money and justice.

Ideally, there should be no relationship at all. Justice should not be measurable in monetary units – it should, like health care, be equally available to the wealthiest and to the poorest.

That's the ideal, anyway, but as we do not live in an ideal world, it's not one that stands up to close scrutiny. I doubt there are too many people out there who would doubt that the richer you are – meaning, of course, the better the lawyers you can afford – the rosier your chances are of winning a lawsuit.

Merely looking at the title – Mutu v Chelsea – suggests a mismatch. A vastly rich club against a player. That impression may well be unfair to the English club as I see nothing to suggest that – so far, anyway – Mutu has been lacking top legal advice. But this is a case that has been going on for nearly five years and the end is not yet in sight.

The details are well known, suffice to say that Mutu took the case back to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which in July of this year issued a 36-page judgment that rejected most of the Romanian's arguments and upheld the FIFA decision that he must pay £14.6million to Chelsea.

Mutu's lawyers say an appeal is likely and the only resource now left open to him would appear to be the European Court of Justice.

In other words, Mutu would then be doing the very thing that CAS was created to avoid: he would be taking a strictly football matter out of the hands of the football authorities (FIFA) and the sports authorities (CAS) and presenting it to a court of the legal system proper.

Too many links

CAS, of course, is not part of that system. It was set up in 1984 by Juan Antonio Samaranch, who was then president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), which is based in Lausanne, Switzerland. And it was here that it ran into problems when a Swiss court, concerned that CAS had too many links to the IOC, forced a restructuring that was designed to ensure independence.

I said at the beginning that this case intrigued me, and the source of my interest lies here, in this matter of arbitration bodies.

CAS, as currently constituted, positively bristles with the trappings of the law. It uses – I imagine "employs" is not the right word to apply in this situation – some 150 lawyers from all over the world (59 of whom are specifically assigned to deal with football matters) and in its hearings it allows both parties to appoint their own representatives.

As far as sports go, I have no doubt at all that legal systems everywhere are quite happy to see their own workload lightened by the existence of these arbitration bodies.

But the fact remains that such bodies are invariably set up by the sports authorities that are heavily involved in the cases to be heard. This is a situation that brings to mind the requirement that justice must not only be done, it must be *seen* to be done.

In that light, CAS has a major problem in the case of Mutu versus Chelsea. The case is a tricky one because it looks so imbalanced. It has all the appearance of a lonely player who made a mistake being bullied and victimised by a super-rich club with its army of lawyers. After all, there are a number of cases in which football clubs have provided considerable support for players who have run into drug or alcohol problems. Chelsea's approach with Mutu does not look good against such comparisons.

"Should Mutu win his case before a European court, what future then for the Court of Arbitration for Sport?"

That may well be more of a PR problem than a legal one, but it is not one that CAS, with its quasi-legal status and its establishment-oriented origins is likely to dispel. The CAS decision, which almost fully supports Chelsea, only underlines the image problem.

Should Mutu win his case before a European court, what future then for the Court of Arbitration for Sport? Or, for that matter, for the current FIFA regulations on player status? ●

Happier times...Mutu (left) with his boss at Chelsea, Jose Mourinho

Jim Holden

Will the real Zlatan Ibrahimovic please stand up?

WHENEVER THE name of Zlatan Ibrahimovic is mentioned in English football circles the immediate response is wave after wave of scepticism and scorn. The tall Swede is condemned as a striker who never performs well on the big stage and who, despite his physical prowess, is always anonymous against the aggressive defences of Premier League teams in Europe.

Yes, he can show wonderful talent, but, in an echo of the enigma that was Eric Cantona, there seems a certain something missing at the very highest level of the game.

A record of 18 goals in 66 games in the Champions League with Juventus and Internazionale, and 21 goals in 56 internationals for Sweden (five of them in one match against Malta), is proof positive, so the English believe, that here is the most overrated player in the world of football.

Typical of this widespread attitude is the view of former Chelsea midfielder Andy Townsend, now the main Champions League TV pundit for English channel ITV, who says: "Rarely have I seen a player so often flatter to deceive. He disappears in the major European matches."

Mention the name of Ibrahimovic in Europe, by contrast, and what you are struck by is a cascade of fulsome praise. The great coaches of the continent rave about his combination of strength, style, fabulous ball control and a phenomenal goalscoring record in Serie A that has seen him on target 57 times in 88 matches for Inter.

Watch some of his goals on YouTube, not least a stunning solo effort for Ajax against NAC Breda some years ago, and you cannot fail to be captivated.

So, for me, the most fascinating move during football's summer of gargantuan transfer spending was the deal that took Ibrahimovic from Inter to Barcelona.

And the most compelling question is this: will paying £35million plus Samuel Eto'o to acquire Ibrahimovic prove to be a monumental blunder by Barcelona? Or is it the swoop that will leave Real Madrid's serial record-breaking extravagance in the shade?

Inter coach Jose Mourinho, who is as pragmatic and clear-eyed and special as a football boss can be, did not want to lose the Sweden striker. He fought against the deal, and that speaks volumes.

Then there is Barca's head honcho, Pep Guardiola. You can hardly doubt his intelligence and tactical perception after the triple triumph of last season. You have to suspect that he knows what he is doing in adding a forward of physical presence to complement his otherwise miniature marvels.

Guardiola clearly concurs with the view gaining currency that Ibrahimovic last season showed serious signs that he has shelved the selfishness in his play and can now become a striker willing to take a full role in the combination play that is Barcelona's hallmark.

If the great enigma truly has matured, both as a man and as a player, then the high price will be worth it for Barca.

Elsewhere in these pages (see Headliners, page 16), Marcello Lippi, the coach of Italy, expresses the view that Inter had much the best of this transfer exchange in acquiring Eto'o as well as bundles of cash.

But once the deal has been done, once the money has been spent or banked, the only way to judge will be on performance.

Ibrahimovic himself has no doubts. "I am absolutely in my best-ever form," he said a few weeks ago.

"I have never played at this level before and I was the top scorer in Serie A last season. When I first went to Italy people said I was a fantastic player but didn't score many goals. I want to hear what they say now."

Good knockabout stuff, of course, but the truth for Ibrahimovic is that the season to come will be the defining year of his sporting career. He is 27 years old, the prime age for a footballer, and he is now playing for the reigning European champions – and working for a coach who has actively chosen him.

> "Ibrahimovic will show **his finest colours** in a Barcelona shirt ... **the English will finally discover** what all the fuss is about"

There can be no excuses; no disappearing when confronted by the rugged defenders of the major English clubs. This is the time to show himself to be one of the great players of his generation – or to prove that the sceptics are correct, that he is a butterfly talent who flatters to deceive, that he cannot command the great stage, that he is the most overrated player of the 21st century.

Me? Well, I'm with Mourinho and Guardiola. I think Zlatan Ibrahimovic will show his finest colours in a Barcelona shirt in the months ahead.

I reckon the English will finally discover what all the fuss is about. ●

HEROES...

Name that player...Chernomorets Burgas' Michel Platini (right)

MICHEL PLATINI

No, not the UEFA president. Rather the Brazilian striker – full name Michel Platini Ferreira Mesquita – who is currently shining for Bulgarian side Chernomorets Burgas.

LAURENT BLANC

Bordeaux's ever-impressive coach told it exactly as it is when he described prices for "ordinary" footballers as "totally crazy".

BALASZ DZSUDZSAK

The PSV attacker will never strike two better free-kicks from distance than the couple he fired home in his team's heart-stopping 4-3 win over Ajax.

FABIO CANNAVARO

The Juventus defender won a record 127th Italy cap when he played in the friendly against Switzerland.

& VILLAINS

DAVID BECKHAM

The LA Galaxy midfielder's miserable spell in Major League Soccer continued when he was sent off for a two-footed lunge at Seattle Sounders' Peter Vagenas.

GINO COUTINHO

The Den Haag goalkeeper, who is a former Holland youth international, was arrested following the discovery of 4,500 cannabis plants in a warehouse that he owns.

Seeing red...Beckham (far left) is given his marching orders

Dope...Coutinho

FEDERICO GARCIA

The Argentinian defender, who plays for The Strongest in Bolivia, was arrested after lashing out at police officers as they tried to prevent him from reaching the referee to protest at a last-minute equaliser in his side's 2-2 draw at Real Mamore in the Bolivian closing championship.

ZHAO SHITONG

The Tianjin player was banned for life for leading an attack on referee He Zhibiao, who had dismissed three Tianjin players in Beijing's 3-1 victory in a qualifier for China's 11th national games. Keeper Li Gen and midfielder Hao Tengjiao, who also chased the official from the pitch, were each given three-year bans.

September 2009 Vol 49 No 13

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PICTURES Pictures copyright: Empics, Getty Images, Action Images and Reuters

Thanks this issue to Tim Barnett, Mike Hughes, Peter Neish, David Rallis, John Rennie

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Annual subscription is for 12 months (13 issues, prices include postage) UK: £48.10
Europe/Eire (inc. VAT): 78.95euros (airmail)
USA: $99.45 (airmail)
Rest of world: £83.15 (airmail)

Periodicals paid at Rahway, NJ Postmaster: send address changes to *World Soccer*, c/o MAIL America, 365 Blair Road, Avenel NJ 07001, USA. USPS004075

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- A Bola (Portugal)
- Don Balon (Spain)
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13 STORIES YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT

USA
American oddity
David Beckham's problems at LA Galaxy continued. More, page 32

ENGLAND
Bobby Robson mourned
English football paid tribute to the former England manager, who died from cancer, aged 76. More, page 8

SPAIN
Dani Jarque RIP
Espanyol were mourning their captain after he died from a heart attack during a summer training camp in Italy. More, page 18

SPAIN
The missing link for Madrid?
Xabi Alonso could be Real Madrid's most significant signing of the summer. More, page 34

MEXICO
Turning point
The national team celebrated wins over rivals USA in the Gold Cup and the World Cup qualifiers. More, pages 31 and 121

ARGENTINA
Stalemate
The start of the new season was delayed by a row between clubs and the FA over money and TV rights. More, page 24

BRAZIL
Continuing cull of the coaches
More coaches lost their jobs in the national championship. More, page 27

NORWAY
Back in contention
A 4-0 win over Scotland brought Norway's stuttering World Cup campaign back to life. More, page 121

RUSSIA
Advocaat sacked
Zenit St Petersburg parted company with their Dutch coach. More, page 45

SWITZERLAND
Adrian Mutu and CAS
The Fiorentina forward could take his case to the civil courts after a controversial ruling from the Court of Arbitration for Sport. More, pages 11 and 17

ITALY
Eto'o or Ibrahimovic?
Debate has raged over who got the better from the Eto'o-Ibrahimovic deal: Inter or Barca? More, pages 12 and 16

CHINA
Chinese awayday
Lazio were the surprise winners of the Italian season's opening game – played at the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing. More, page 28

AFRICA
Changing places
A change in the FIFA statutes could benefit African countries. More, page 44

HEADLINERS

People in the news...on and off the pitch

Samuel Eto'o & Zlatan Ibrahimovic

The summer's most intriguing deal

ITALY & SPAIN

SO, WHO DID the better out of the much-hyped deal which saw Internazionale offload Sweden striker Zlatan Ibrahimovic in return for Barcelona's Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o (plus around £45million)?

The website of *Gazzetta dello Sport* was one of the first to offer an answer. In an ad hoc poll, 60 per cent of the Italian sports daily's readers argued that Ibrahimovic was the better player and Inter would be the weaker for his departure.

In a sense, this is hardly surprising. In five seasons in Italian soccer – two with Juventus and three with Inter – Ibrahimovic had always ended up on the Serie A title-winning team (even allowing for the fact Juventus were later stripped of their titles by the Calciopoli match-fixing scandal).

Not everyone, however, saw it this way. Italy coach Marcello Lippi was just one of those willing to suggest that Inter will be just as strong, if not stronger, with Eto'o instead of Ibrahimovic.

"There's no way that Eto'o is inferior to Ibrahimovic. On the contrary, he has a higher strike rate than the Swede," commented Lippi.

In an opinion piece, *Gazzetta dello Sport* was even more explicit, arguing that Inter and owner Massimo Moratti had definitely got the best of the deal: "Inter have sold their 28-year-old leading goal scorer in Serie A and replaced him with the 28-year-old leading goal scorer in the Liga who, furthermore, is a specialist in scoring decisive goals in big games such as Champions League Finals.

"Inter spent €25m to buy Ibrahimovic and won three consecutive titles with him. Now they are selling him for three times that price, in the process saving €3m per annum in salary costs. Whatever way you look at it, this is the biggest financial deal pulled off in the Moratti era."

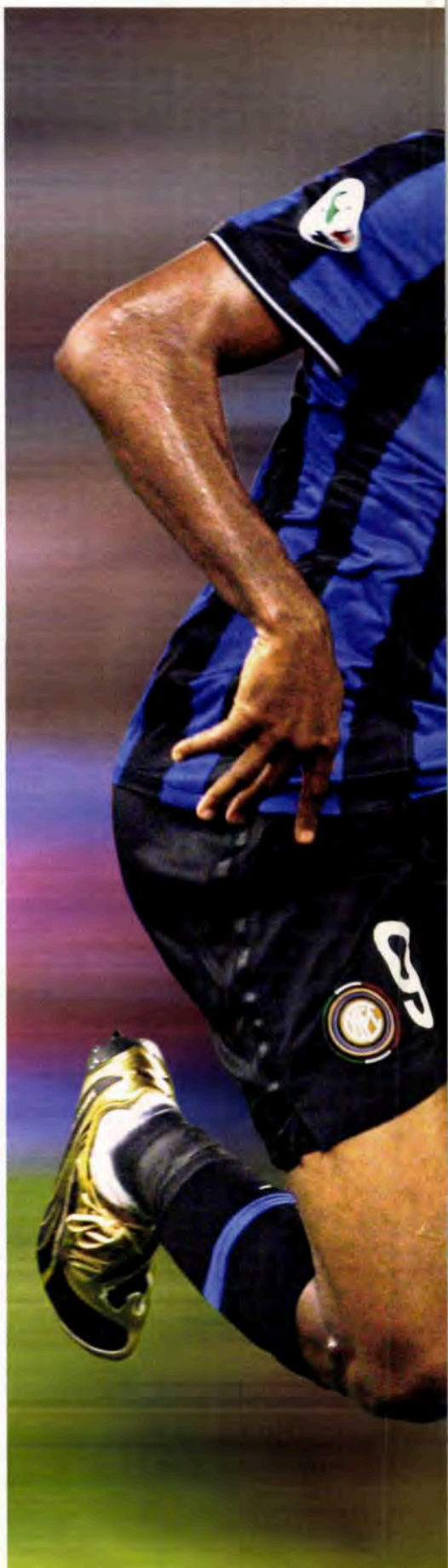
From a tactical viewpoint, the arrival of Eto'o may pose some intriguing problems. Such was the overall strength of Ibrahimovic that he tended to dominate team tactics. Under both Roberto Mancini and current coach Jose Mourinho, there were many times, especially in big matches, when Inter's main tactic seemed to be "knock it up to Ibra, and he'll invent something".

With a more orthodox centre-forward such as Eto'o, the Inter game plan will have to change. Mourinho's side will have to find a more inventive and creative way of getting the ball up to the front man, prompting some optimistic Inter fans to argue that the arrival of Eto'o will inevitably see the side play more attractive football than that witnessed last season. We will see.

In the meantime, however, it comes as no surprise that Mourinho has been looking for a creative No10, someone like Chelsea's Deco or either of Real Madrid's two Dutchmen: Rafael Van der Vaart and Wesley Sneijder.

The Inter transfer market looks as if it will remain open and active up to the deadline.

Paddy Agnew



Ibrahimovic...finished top of Serie A five times

Eto'o...Inter got the Cameroon striker and around £45million

Adrian Mutu
Romania striker vows to fight CAS ruling

ITALY

ADRIAN MUTU is threatening to take a legal step which will question the very status, competence and credibility of the Lausanne-based Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

Last month, CAS rejected the 30-year-old's appeal against the FIFA disciplinary order that he must pay almost £15million to Chelsea in compensation following his sacking after a positive drugs test in 2004. Mutu now plans to pursue the matter through the civil courts.

The genesis of the issue was a private dope test five years ago when he was playing for the London side. They had signed him in 2003 for £16m from Italian club Parma in the first wave of high-price star signings under Roman Abramovich.

The Romanian arrived with a playboy reputation and had scored six goals in 21 Premier League starts when his English career came to a sudden halt after a substitute's appearance in a goalless draw away to Aston Villa in September 2004. Later it emerged that he had failed a dope test for cocaine ordered by the club.

His contract was cancelled for gross misconduct, he was suspended from football for seven months and Chelsea claimed £14.6m in damages for a share of his purchase cost and wages. The following January, Juventus signed Mutu as a free agent, only to sell him on to Fiorentina in the summer of 2006.

In the meantime Mutu had begun to fight Chelsea through the sport's disciplinary system.

Initially, a Premier League appeals committee ruled that Mutu, by testing positive for cocaine, had breached his employment contract without just cause. Mutu complained to FIFA, who decided it had no jurisdiction. Mutu then went to CAS, who ruled that FIFA was mistaken, after which FIFA's disciplinary panel duly upheld Chelsea's claim in May 2008 and Mutu appealed to the CAS once more.

Civil action...Mutu

He scored Romania's only goal in the European Championship finals and found the net 13 times for Fiorentina last season before going back to Lausanne – where CAS dismissed his latest appeal.

This prompted his threat to take the matter beyond sport and challenge the status of CAS.

Cristian Sarbu, one of Mutu's lawyers, says: "If you are not satisfied with a sports court decision then you resort to civil courts. I am confident the matter will continue from this angle."

Football has already set a precedent for defiance. In 2006 CAS ruled Gibraltar had valid grounds to be admitted to membership by UEFA. However, UEFA congress still voted Gibraltar's application down after intensive lobbying by Spain.

Mutu has described the decision against him as inhumane, the penalty exorbitant and he says he will stand up "for my rights as any normal European citizen".

Keir Radnedge

Dani Jarque
Tributes to the late Espanyol captain after sudden, unexplained heart attack

SPAIN

Leader...Jarque had been appointed Espanyol captain before the start of this season

SPANISH football is mourning the sudden loss of a second player in two years after Espanyol captain Dani Jarque died of a heart attack on the club's pre-season tour of Florence in Italy.

Candles, photographs and tributes have been left at the club's new stadium in scenes similar to those witnessed following the death of 23-year-old Sevilla's Antonio Puerta at the start of the 2007-08 season. Arsenal midfielder Cesc Fabregas, a former team-mate in the Spain Under-21 squad, held up Jarque's no21 shirt in tribute after scoring against Everton on the opening day of the Premier League season.

Jarque complained of feeling unwell while resting at the team's hotel following a morning training session and retired to his room. He was talking on the phone to his girlfriend, who was eight months pregnant, when the line went silent. Concerned, she rang team-mates of Jarque, who found him unconscious. His heart had stopped.

The club's medical staff tried to revive him, an ambulance was dispatched and further attempts were made to resuscitate the 26-year-old over the course of an hour, but to no avail. He had suffered a sudden and unexplained heart attack. Espanyol had only recently carried out pre-season medical tests and there was no indication that Jarque suffered any kind of heart problem or, as yet, that there was any underlying cause. The full results of his autopsy are not yet known.

Born in Sant Boi de Llobregat, Jarque had been named Espanyol's skipper just a month previously, ahead of the new season. It was a particular honour as he was set to lead the team in their return "home". After more than a decade playing as tenants in the city's Olympic stadium, Espanyol had finally fulfilled their great obsession and built a stadium of their own near the city's airport – not far from Sant Boi de Llobregat. There have been suggestions that the new stadium could be named in his honour.

Jarque, who had been watched by a number of clubs in England, among them Tottenham Hotspur, was one of those hopeful of getting a call-up to the Spain squad in time for next year's World Cup. A European Under-19 champion with Spain in 2002, he was part of the Espanyol side that won the Spanish Cup in 2005-06 and played in the 2007 Uefa Cup Final against Sevilla.

On that occasion, among Jarque's opponents was Antonio Puerta, who died suddenly after suffering a heart attack on the pitch during Sevilla's opening game of the following season against Getafe. Last season, Real Madrid midfielder Ruben De la Red was forced to pull out of the squad after he collapsed on the pitch and doctors discovered a heart defect.

Tests are still on-going to see if De la Red can return to the game. There have been calls for tighter controls of players' heart conditions, but there is no indication that either his collapse or the tragic deaths of Jarque or Puerta could have been avoided.

Sid Lowe

Cesc's mate...the midfielder's tribute

Gracious...Ballack consoles Ryan Giggs after the Community Shield

Michael Ballack
Germany's captain struggles for a place at Chelsea

ENGLAND

MICHAEL BALLACK has a problem. He is captain of Germany and hopes to lead them into the World Cup finals in South Africa next year – though Russia, in October, will have other ideas. Yet at club level, with Chelsea, his status and prospects are nothing like as secure.

His talents may be appreciated, which is why Chelsea have tied him to a contract extension, but how his talents will be used is another issue entirely now that Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti has decided the diamond is the tactical shape of things to come at Stamford Bridge.

Ballack arrived at Chelsea on a free transfer in 2006 after running down his contract with Bayern Munich. His presence on the open market was just too good to miss for owner Roman Abramovich who was hell-bent – in the pre-recession era – on building a matchless team of all the talents.

However, Ballack at Chelsea is not the Ballack of Bayern and Germany. Back home he had been captain, leader, irreplaceable. But Chelsea already had several of those – notably John Terry and Frank Lampard – so Ballack has been "merely" just another outstanding player, and the role he fulfilled with Bayern and Germany has never existed.

To be fair, Ballack has been unfortunate with injuries. An ankle injury prompted his falling-out with coach Jose Mourinho a year ahead of Euro 2008. Then, just as Ancelotti started pre-season work on his diamond, Ballack damaged a toe in training in the US and had to fly home for treatment, causing him to miss both important training sessions and tactical adjustment time.

He appeared only as a substitute in the Community Shield victory over Manchester United and in the opening Premier League defeat of Hull City, and therefore it was, perhaps, not mere coincidence that Germany were unimpressive as they won 2-0 away to Azerbaijan in the World Cup qualifiers inbetween.

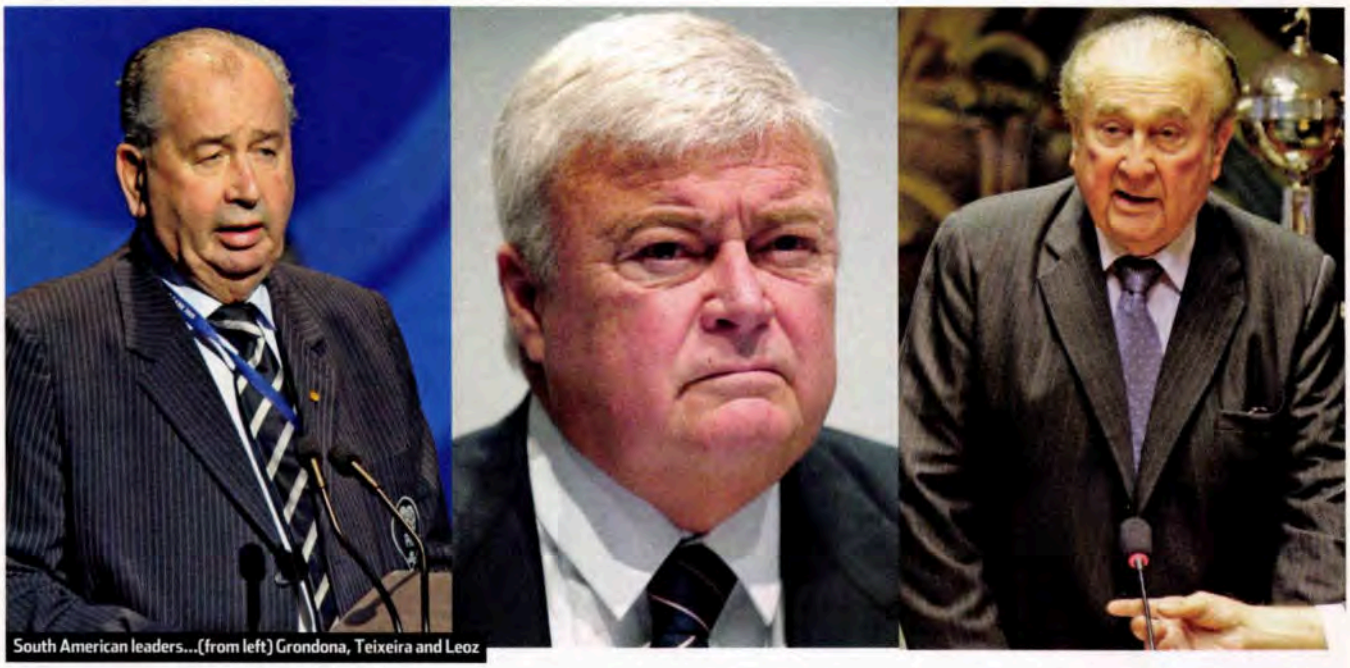
Ballack's place at Chelsea now is not obvious. The club has a surfeit of talented and varied midfielders. Lampard is fixed at the point of the diamond and Ballack does not fill the busily aggressive profile needed for the defensive screen (John Obi Mikel or, in emergency, Michael Essien).

But Chelsea were using a diamond under Mourinho when Ballack arrived, so he believes in its potential. "Of course it does feel different not to play with wingers and to play with two strikers. But you can play any system with good players and they have to show their ability," says Ballack. "It is not about the system, it is about how individuals perform on the pitch."

Also, it's about the right opportunity.

Keir Radnedge

Keir Radnedge



South American leaders...(from left) Grondona, Teixeira and Leoz

Where are FIFA's ethics now?

South American leadership scandals can no longer be ignored by world governing body

SOUTH AMERICA brings nine votes to the FIFA congress table, which is a drop in the ocean among the world federation's 200-plus membership. However, more to the power point, so to speak, the continent brings three votes to the 24-strong executive committee which governs the worldwide game.

Take the case of CONMEBOL president Nicolas Leoz, who was the only football director publicly "fingered" in the Swiss trial which followed the collapse of ISL – FIFA's former long-term marketing partner. His isolation made it possible for the Zurich bunker to dissemble.

A word game followed in which descriptions of the monies which accrued to Leoz varied from "commissions" at one end of the scale to rather less polite terms at the other.

But that was an old issue. It was buried in legalese, no one was prosecuted. FIFA could pass it off and carry on. It was business as usual.

But no longer. The state and questionable capabilities of South America's football leadership is an increasingly evident cause for concern which cannot be ignored.

Events have begun to snowball. First we have had Argentinian domestic football, under the long-time leadership of FIFA's senior vice-president Julio Grondona, sleepwalking into a financial black hole which prompted the tactical suspension of the new league campaign; then we had Brazilian confederation president Ricardo Teixeira convicted of, well, smuggling.

Yet this is the continent which boasts a significant voice within the FIFA executive and which will host the 2014 World Cup, in Teixeira's own Brazilian backyard.

The situation in Argentina is covered elsewhere (see Dispatches, page 24), suffice to say that the state of the country's football finances have long been a bad joke and Grondona suspended the league to force more money out of TV, whose advertisers need the football "window".

Leave of absence...Coe

In the old days, when countries such as Spain, Italy and France offered homes from home for most Argentinian players, European import restrictions kept that flow to manageable proportions. Players remained at home, maintaining the quality of the domestic game, until their mid-20s, and were not queueing up at Ezeiza airport to fly the Atlantic as they are now.

Also, European restrictions meant that the Madrids, Milans and Marseilles spent their money on ready-made players and did not dare gamble away one of their few all-important foreign-player slots on an untried teenager who was all

Read more from Keir Radnedge at worldsoccer.com

potential and questionable potency.

The easing of European access through the consequences which followed Bosman has changed all that – and more.

Cases such as those involving Carlos Tevez and Robinho demonstrated very clearly that starry-eyed South American kids are being bought up not so much by the clubs as by talent scouts and agents – who often receive far more than the club when they come to be sold off to the highest European bidder.

Thus clubs in Argentina, to take this example, are not even receiving the full transfer value which once came their way and enabled them to survive from year to year.

To cover the revenue gaps South America's directors have created an ever-changing network of international competitions to keep as many clubs as busy as possible and therefore create as many opportunities as possible to take cash at the gate. But more matches plus fewer class players equals a drop in quality which does not sell well, hence the need for more matches to cover the fall in revenue. A vicious circle indeed.

The Argentinian league suspension brought Grondona – who World Cup-winning coach Carlos Bilardo once considered challenging for the AFA leadership – under greater fire than at any previous stage, even during the worst of the hooligan wars. He has agreed that perhaps he should have acted sooner, excusing himself as if he were some sort of benevolent grandfather figure.

Then, along came the Teixeira case.

Pele excluded

The first time the world game became seriously aware of Teixeira was in late 1993, at the draw in Las Vegas for the 1994 USA World Cup finals. The American media was baffled when FIFA president Joao Havelange refused to involve Pele – the one soccer star whose US fame transcended the game – in the ceremonials. But Havelange's reasoning was logical. For him, at least.

Pele had been involved in a war of words with Teixeira back in Brazil over the carve-up of domestic television rights. Plus, Teixeira was not only president of the Brazilian confederation, he was also Havelange's son-in-law. (That Havelange should have mixed family business with the greater good of the World Cup was one of the first signs that he was starting to lose his political grip and, of course, four years later he retired.)

Teixeira, empowered by the Havelange shadow, has reigned as Brazilian football president for 20 years. Yet this is the same Teixeira who has just been banned for three years from holding political office and from undertaking commercial deals with state or federal authorities for avoiding customs taxes. "Smuggling", in lay parlance.

The case relates to an incident in 1994 when Teixeira led the victorious Brazil team home from the World Cup in the United States. The Brazilian delegation arrived home with 17 tonnes of imported goods which – on Teixeira's orders – were not declared for customs-tax assessment.

Teixeira would doubtless say that, as with the 2001 congress and senate report on domestic football corruption, the charges were all motivated for political reasons.

"The picture across FIFA's South American board is not a healthy or happy one for the image of the game"

But the picture across FIFA's South American board is not a healthy or happy one for the image of the game.

This all cries out for an ethics commission to take control. However, by great good fortune for some, FIFA ethics commission president Sebastian Coe is away from his desk. Lord Coe has been granted long-term leave of absence because he is a member of the board of England's World Cup 2018 bid organisation.

Clearly it is much too much to expect any stand-in to launch an inquiry of his own. In any case, the ethics commission has jurisdiction only over events since 2006 – and the Teixeira case (like the Jack Warner World Cup tickets issue) falls safely into the long grass of pre-history.

Indeed, whether Coe will even return after December 2010, when the World Cup decisions are taken, is open to speculation. By then he will be just 18 months away from the London Olympics of which he is organising chairman and, in 2011, he may be a front runner in the race to succeed Lamine Diack (who has domestic political ambitions in Senegal) as president of the International Athletics Federation. ●

No place for the Villa

FORGET Villa Park in Birmingham as a venue for the 2012 Olympic Games football tournament. Aston Villa's historic home had been one of the grounds scheduled for use during the opening group stage. However, the club's American owner, Randy Lerner, is planning major redevelopment work in the next few years which would make a guarantee of availability impossible.

The London organisers have been working closely with the various selected venues over the past eight months, but they have reached a point of needing firm commitments. This was impossible for Villa, who need to expand Villa Park as best they can to compete in the financially rarefied atmosphere at the top of the Premier League.

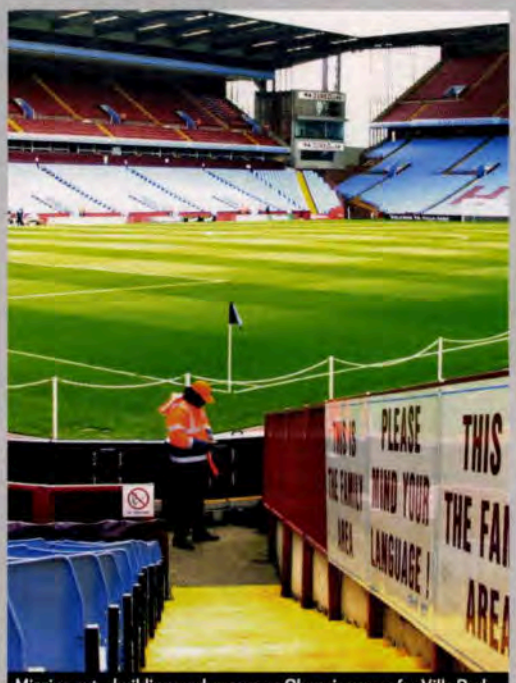
The other grounds pencilled in are Hampden Park (Glasgow), Millennium Stadium (Cardiff), Old Trafford (Manchester), St James' Park (Newcastle) and Wembley (London). Villa Park's withdrawal offers the organisers the opportunity of a major review of likely venues.

Birmingham City and Coventry City have both been suggested as potential replacements in the Midlands. On the other hand, perhaps the entire package of venues should be reconsidered.

After all, the Scottish and Welsh associations have refused to support the British Olympic football team so why should Hampden and Cardiff stage matches?

The SFA has jurisdiction over whatever form of competitive football is staged within its territory and it is perfectly at home with Olympic matches being played at Hampden because it supports London's Olympic staging. Its problem is purely a team issue.

Seems like a contradiction in terms to me.



Missing out...building work means no Olympic games for Villa Park

33 top earners from UEFA competitions in 2008-09

The 32 participants in last season's Champions League each received £4,629,000 just for taking part in the group stages. Clubs received £514,000 for each victory and £257,000 for every draw. Further prize money was awarded in the knockout stages and, most controversially, teams were allocated differing sums from the TV pool depending on the strength of their domestic TV market. Much smaller amounts were paid to teams in the UEFA Cup.

Note: all figures are based on an exchange rate of £1 to €1.167

1 MANCHESTER UNITED
ENG
£38,281,000

2 BAYERN MUNICH
GER
£29,618,000

● Although they were beaten 5-1 on aggregate by Barcelona in the quarter-finals of the Champions League, Bayern – as the sole German team in the knockout stages – received the highest payment from the TV pool: £18.405million.

3 BARCELONA
SPA
£26,544,000

● The champions received a £6m bonus for beating Manchester United in the Final but only £7m from the TV pool.

4 CHELSEA
ENG
£26,492,000

5 WERDER BREMEN
GER
£25,143,000

● Werder's earnings included £6.048m from their passage to the UEFA Cup Final.

6 INTERNAZIONALE
ITA
£24,240,000

7 ARSENAL
ENG
£22,928,000

Cashing in... John O'Shea (right) and Man United may have lost to Thierry Henry's Barcelona in the Champions League Final but they were winners in the revenue stakes

8 ROMA
ITA
£22,328,000

9 PSV EINDHOVEN
HOL
£21,904,000

● The Dutch club finished bottom of their Champions League but they received £16.752m from the TV pool.

10 LYON
FRA
£20,268,000

11 LIVERPOOL
ENG
£19,866,000

12 JUVENTUS
ITA
£18,950,000

13 VILLARREAL
SPA
£18,523,000

14 REAL MADRID
SPA
£17,338,000

15 PANATHINAIKOS
GRE
£15,859,000

16 BORDEAUX
FRA
£14,860,000

17 FIORENTINA
ITA
£14,413

18 ATLETICO MADRID
SPA
£13,974,000

19 MARSEILLE
FRA
£13,485,000

● Marseille's earnings included £1.202m from the UEFA Cup.

20 PORTO
POR
£12,424,000

Head for figures...Panathinaikos (green) and Anorthosis both did well out of Europe

Reward...Jean Makoun (yellow) helped make Lyon the best-remunerated French side

21 FENERBAHCE
TUR
£12,201,000

22 CELTIC
SCO
£10,944,000

23 AALBORG
DEN
£10,466,000

24 SPORTING LISBON
POR
£9,953,000

25 SHAKHTAR DONETSK
UKR
£9,739,000

● Shakhtar earned £3.104m from winning the UEFA Cup and £6.635m from participating in the group stages of the Champions League.

26 DYNAMO KYIV
UKR
£7,460,000

● Dynamo earned £0.867m from reaching the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup and £6.593m from the Champions League groups stage.

27 BASLE
SWI
£7,255,000

28 ZENIT ST PETERSBURG
RUS
£6,976,000

29 CFR CLUJ
ROM
£6,521,000

30 ANORTHOSIS
CYP
£6,475,000

31 BATE BORISOV
BLS
£5,437,000

32 STEAUA BUCHAREST
ROM
£5,899,000

33 MANCHESTER CITY
ENG
£4,609,000

● The only team on the list who did not play in the Champions League group stages. Instead, City's earnings all came from reaching the UEFA Cup quarter-finals and include £3.960m from the TV pool.

Price to pay...semi-finalists Arsenal (yellow) got the better of Roma in the first knockout round

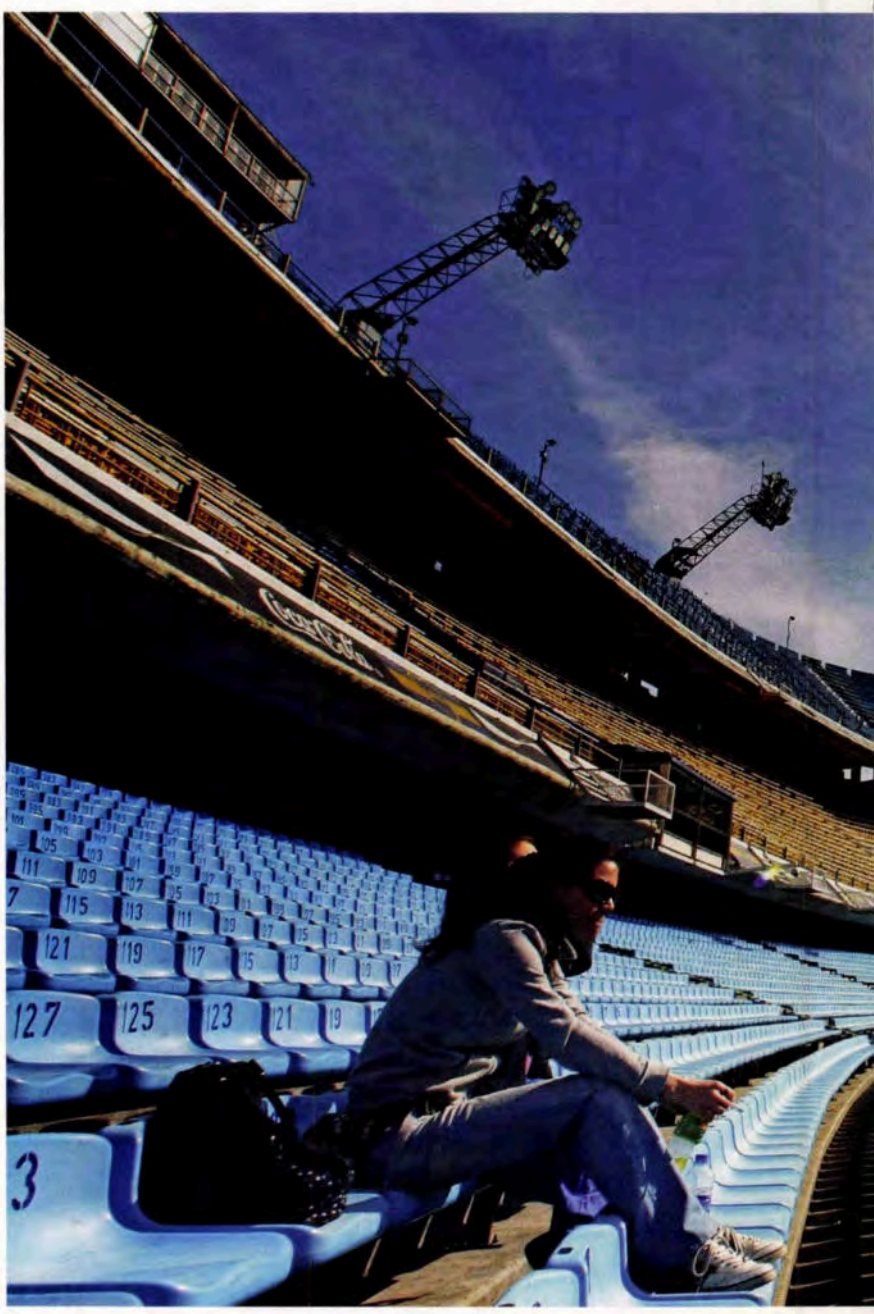
DISPATCHES

INDEX

ARGENTINA P24
BRAZIL P27
ITALY P28
MEXICO P31
USA P32
SPAIN P34
SCOTLAND P36
ALAND ISLANDS P37
CHILE P38
GERMANY P40
PORTUGAL P41
BAHRAIN P42
AFRICA P44
RUSSIA P45
SWITZERLAND P46

Stalemate

The new season failed to kick off on time after the poor state of club finances forced the government to step in with a new TV deal



ARGENTINA

ERIC WEIL in Buenos Aires

BACK IN 2001, Argentina's top-flight players held up the championship when they went on strike in protest at not being paid their wages. Not for the first time, they were complaining about the country's poorly-run clubs, who raked in money with big transfers to Europe and from other sources, but then spent it badly – with some of it ending up in the wrong pockets.

On that occasion the Argentinian FA (AFA) lent the clubs money to pay their players and fulfill other financial obligations, such as tax. A condition of the loans was that the AFA would appoint independent auditors to check the clubs' books. It never happened. Two years ago, the tax authorities, suspecting possible money laundering in the transfer of players abroad, asked the AFA for assistance in their investigations. The AFA, in turn, asked the clubs for details of who owned what percentage of player's contracts. Hardly any clubs complied.

Eight years later, the start of the 2009-10 season was held up, again by

Can't pay... Marcelo Bombau of broadcaster TyC aghast at demands

When does the match start...fans had to wait a week for the big kick-off

Don't pay...Kirchner wants free TV soccer

the players. This time, the players union claimed its members were owed salary payments totalling £6.6million. The real amount owing was probably much higher but many players had not submitted formal claims. It has been calculated that the total debt of Argentinian clubs is around £33m.

Julio Grondona, AFA chief for the last 30 years and nearing 80 years of age, sprang into action – something he has not done very often in recent times – but he may have put his foot in it.

Grondona asked the league's TV rights holders, Torneos y Competencias (TyC), which was due to pay £44m to screen games this season, to cough up more than twice as much. Not unexpectedly, it refused.

TyC's head, Marcelo Bombau, pointed out that the local TV market does not earn nearly the amount asked for and said: "The clubs have been irresponsible with their finances and the AFA never controlled anything. So whatever money you give them, they'll still not make ends meet."

State funds

Grondona's next step was to knock on government doors. Officials initially told him that state funds could not be used to pay the debts of badly-managed clubs and passed the ball back to television. However, it appears that the country's president, Cristina Kirchner – who wants everybody to be able to watch football free on TV – then suggested Grondona should break the contract with TyC.

Grondona, who is also a FIFA vice-president and handles the world governing body's finances, had been heavily criticised when he signed a lengthy contract with TyC in the 1990s, which was due to run until 2014. Grondona thus broke the deal with TyC (which is now seeking hefty compensation) and announced that the new championship would start one week late, with or without TV.

A meeting was arranged at which Grondona and club directors were due to meet president Kirchner, and an announcement was set to be made that the official state TV channel would televise soccer matches for free – the only such situation in South America – with the clubs receiving £100m for the season.

However, in a country where government guarantees are notoriously unreliable, some cabinet ministers are now denying such a financial transaction will take place.

Amid all of this, the clubs are claiming that their problems are all down to the global financial downturn and say they cannot sell players to Europe, as they have done in the past. Yet that is only a partial explanation for their financial mess.

> **"Investors own ever more players and want to profit by moving them on quickly"**

Despite their claims, clubs are continuing to buy and sell players; the real problem lies with the investors who now own more and more of those footballers. These are not people interested in keeping players at clubs; instead, they want to profit by selling them on quickly, with very little of the transfer fee going to the clubs.

As an example of how unprofessional clubs have been, San Lorenzo – who have debts of £12m – have had to give several players free transfers in exchange for their salary claims, and the players union has said the club's entire squad could claim free transfers. However, most clubs, despite their debts, continue to give their hooligan gangs free tickets and pay for their transport to games.

Players union secretary Sergio Marchi says that if clubs not complying with their obligations were relegated, or had deducted points, as is the case in several other countries, the problems would be eradicated.

Perhaps he forgets this is Argentina, where football reigns supreme. ●

Strike...the players union claimed its members were owed £6.6million

Dancing to a different tune

The managerial merry-go-round continues in the national championship

COACHES WERE falling like ninepins as the Brazilian championship approached the halfway stage. After 18 of the 38 rounds there had been 16 switches at 13 different clubs. With two of the others having changed coach on the eve of the kick-off, it means that only five clubs – Avai, Corinthians, Cruzeiro, Goias and Internacional – have had the same man in charge since the start of May.

In addition to impatience from the supporters and the media's hunger for a story, job survival for Brazilian coaches is jeopardised by the difficulties of operating in a calendar out of sync with the rest of the world.

The domestic action starts just as the Libertadores Cup reaches its closing stages and clubs involved in the continental competition often find it difficult to compete on two fronts. Either they field reserve sides in the national championship and find themselves in trouble (as happened this year to Cruzeiro, who only now are pulling away from the relegation zone), or they suffer post-Libertadores depression, like Sport Recife, who are rooted to the bottom of the table.

Then there is the opening of the global transfer window, which rips teams apart in the middle of the competition. Brazil's president Lula, a fanatical Corinthians supporter, complained after the club sold key midfielder Cristian, international left-back Andre Santos and attacking midfielder Douglas, fearing that the club might be relegated once again. Indeed, there has been a slump in results, especially since Ronaldo fell awkwardly and picked up an injury. But Corinthians are currently sitting comfortably in mid-table and, providing they are not sucked into the relegation battle, their work for this year is done. Winning the Brazilian Cup in July means they have already qualified for next year's Libertadores. They are the only major Sao Paulo club not to have won the trophy so to do so in 2010, their centenary year, is the ultimate dream.

> "Midway through the season there have been 16 managerial changes at 13 clubs"

New man...Ricardo Gomes takes a training session at Sao Paulo

Corinthians will be joined in the Libertadores by the top four in the Brazilian championship, with local rivals Palmeiras set to be one of them. Now under Muricy Ramalho, who has taken Sao Paulo to the title for the past three years, Palmeiras topped the table at the midway point. Veteran keeper Marcos is going strong, and the team has an excellent midfield axis of Cleiton Xavier, an all-rounder with a rocket shot, and the talented Diego Souza.

Surprise outfit

Two points behind Palmeiras in second were surprise outfit Goias. Helio dos Anjos' side pack the midfield, spring the wing-backs and in the veteran Iarley they have one of the cleverest support strikers in Brazil. The return from Qatar's Al Gharafa of experienced striker Fernandao should help Goias keep the momentum going in the second half of the season.

Third were early leaders Internacional. They ran into patchy form that left coach Tite under pressure and have lost star striker Nilmar to Villarreal, but the squad looks deep enough to mount a challenge. Trailing them on goal difference, Sao Paulo have strung some wins together to move ominously into fifth place. The supporters refer to Sao Paulo as "Jason", standing for the five months from July to November when over the last three years they have come through strongly to take the title. The fans have even taken to wearing masks of the character Jason from the *Friday the 13th* films, perhaps hoping the team, now under Ricardo Gomes, can slash their way through the field and claim yet another championship.

Atletico Mineiro in fifth may be a big club but they have not won the championship since the inaugural edition in 1971. They began the current campaign in chaos, with coach Celso Roth appointed less than a week before kick off.

Four points adrift in ninth were the biggest surprise of the season so far. Barueri, a tiny team from the outskirts of Sao Paulo, are playing their first season in the top flight in front of miniscule crowds. But they are the leading scorers in the competition and have provided two of the outstanding players: the left-footed pair of elegant playmaker Thiago Humberto and Fernandinho, a winger with a superb burst of acceleration.

How long their success can be sustained is a moot point. Their best players will soon be on the move, and coach Estevam Soares has already jumped ship, leaving to take charge of Botafogo in Rio. He replaces the sacked Ney Franco, who moves south to coach Coritiba, who have just dismissed Rene Simoes. And so the dance of the coaches goes on... ●

Chinese awayday

Lazio won the Super Cup in Beijing but Mourinho is labelled a sore loser

ITALY

PADDY AGNEW in Rome

UNDER STARTER'S orders, white flag raised, they're off... and already Jose Mourinho is caught up in unwanted polemics. The occasion was the traditional season curtain-raiser, the Italian Super Cup between Serie A champions Internazionale and Italian Cup holders Lazio, played this year at the Bird's Nest stadium in Beijing, site of last year's Olympics finals.

Most observers would probably agree that the final result, a 2-1 win for Lazio, was somewhat fortuitous. In a game largely dominated by Inter, who in the process played some smart football, Lazio struck against the run of play with second-half goals from Brazilian midfielder Matuzalem and experienced striker Tommaso Rocchi. Inter hit back with a 78th-minute goal from new signing Cameroon striker Samuel Eto'o and a disallowed goal from their other new signing Diego Milito, but in the end they had to accept defeat.

Mourinho and Inter club owner Massimo Moratti both immediately pronounced themselves more than happy with their side's performance. However, local Chinese journalists were less impressed. After a series of questions at the post-match press conference as to why things had "gone wrong", an exasperated Mourinho said: "The conclusion is that you don't understand a thing, because all the questions are based on the result. This is not football. If we talk about the result, it was 2-1 to Lazio. If we are talking about the match, then we have to say one team played, the other was lucky. This is football."

Mourinho's answers did not win him many new friends in China, with one website accusing him of having committed "seven sins", namely: "1 Losing the match, 2 Being arrogant, 3 Insulting journalists, 4 Sneering at Chinese football, 5 Despising the Bird's Nest, 6 Refusing to attend a charity dinner, 7 Losing his temper at the Silk Market."

Oh dear, oh dear. The whole point of playing the Super Cup in China was about "maximising business opportunities", "increasing brand awareness" and winning new friends. If Mourinho thought he would leave the polemics behind him in China, he was mistaken. On his return to Rome, triumphant Lazio owner Claudio Lotito hit out at Mourinho's insinuation that Lazio had been lucky, saying: "There are people who don't know how to lose and don't understand the true values of sport. He [Mourinho] thinks that football is all about the more you spend, the more you win. But that's not so and Lazio proved that point in Beijing."

Poor relations

Lotito's delight at winning the Super Cup is more than understandable. His economic resources at the Rome club do not even begin to compare with those of petrol-rich Moratti at Inter. Furthermore, Lazio won the trophy without three key players – Macedonia's Goran Pandev, Argentinian midfielder Cristian Ledesma and full-back Lorenzo De Silvestri – all excluded from the trip because they were in dispute with the club over new contracts.

While Lazio's victory in this unusually early season start – this is a World Cup year, of course – was a welcome blast of oxygen to an Italian scene dominated by Inter, it would be rash to read too much into this result. Lazio will win important games over the next year but the reality is that, even at this stage, there is every reason to believe that this year's Inter could be even stronger than last year's.

> "Lotito's delight at winning the Super Cup is easy to understand. Lazio's economic resources don't even begin to compare with those of Inter"

One informed observer, Italy's team coach Marcello Lippi, puts it this way: "I really like Eto'o, while Milito is one of those class players who works hard for the team. Just watch. With Mourinho he will acquire the right 'European' mentality. At this point, Inter are clearly the strongest team in Italy and they are ready to win in Europe, or to at least reach the Champions League Final."

While Inter were impressing many, even in defeat, city cousins Milan were doing rather less well. In seven August friendlies, the Kaka-less, Ancelotti-less Milan were beaten four times (by Club America, Chelsea, Inter and Bayern Munich), drew twice (Los Angeles Galaxy and Boca Juniors) and managed to win only against lower division Italian team Varese.

So bad were things that the club's owner, Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi, flew into Milanello to reassure the faithful that he had lost neither interest nor enthusiasm for his favourite toy. In the process, Berlusconi promised that Andrea Pirlo, who had seemed on the point of departing for Chelsea, would be staying with the club.

Furthermore, Berlusconi promised a major new purchase, which was duly delivered within hours when Milan shelled out approximately £12million for Real Madrid and Holland striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar.

So far, things have proved difficult for new Milan coach Leonardo, but if the new arrival can work out a good partnership with young Brazil striker Pato then Milan's fortunes may improve.

Another side that might well hope to improve is Lippi's national team. The reigning world champions opened up the season in mid-August with a less than overwhelming 0-0 draw with

Losing friends and alienating people ...business as usual for Mourinho

Read daily dispatches at worldsoccer.com

Against the odds...Rocchi hoists the Super Cup trophy in Beijing's Bird's Nest Stadium after Lazio beat Inter

Firing blanks...Italy take on Switzerland in Basle

Switzerland in Basle. The game did allow Lippi to blood new caps: Genoa defender Domenico Criscito and Juventus midfielder Claudio Marchisio.

For 20 minutes Italy looked bright and busy, and should have taken an early lead. However, from that point on Ottmar Hitzfeld's busy side proved a match for Italy and might have won the game in the 88th minute when Gigi Buffon made an excellent save from substitute Eren Derdiyok.

It's a deal...Huntelaar (left) has joined Milan

Recalling Italy's humiliating exit from the summer's Confederations Cup in South Africa, Lippi welcomed this performance, saying after the game: "We've restarted with another spirit, another attitude. We had a lot of chances, especially in the first half and then after that we almost lost the game, but that would have been an injustice. However, this is a very positive start to the year. As for the new boys, they're here tonight because they will play again."

Next up for Italy are three crucial World Cup qualifiers: Georgia in Tbilisi and Bulgaria in Turin in early September, and Republic of Ireland in Dublin in mid-October.

Final thoughts concern money matters. Sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport* recently calculated that 205 Serie A and Serie B players – including Christian Poulsen, Franco Semioli, Massimo Oddo, Ricardo Quaresma and Andrea Caracciolo – were, with the transfer window fast approaching, still looking for a new contract. So cue plenty of last-minute, low-cost deals.

Other money matters concern Serie A clubs Bari and Bologna, who are both on the market. Bologna seemed to have found a new owner in Albanian petrol millionaire Rezart Taci, who was ready to splash out £20m in July for the club, but then pulled out of the deal in early August, leaving the club still in the hands of the Menarini family.

As for Bari, it is an ongoing story, with club owner Vincenzo Matarrese anxiously awaiting confirmation that the Texan property company JMJ, owned by Tim Barton, will keep its promise and buy the Puglia club for a reported £21m. Watch this space.

Organised crime

The final money matter concerns rather different and unwelcome "investors" in football, namely organised crime. Recalling how the Ndrangheta, the Calabrian mafia, tried to use former Lazio ace Giorgio Chinaglia to buy the club two years ago, Italy's senior Mafia investigator recently said: "There is no way the risk of infiltration [into Italian football] by crooks and organised crime can be underestimated...they are interested in recycling dirty money. We've got to be very attentive to the lower divisions, especially in the south, since they have much lower media visibility."

As the new season gets under way, some familiar problems and polemics have already raised their heads. Whatever else, this is sure to be anything but a dull Italian season. ●

Turning point

Victories over USA in the Gold Cup and World Cup qualifiers have given Mexico hope of reaching South Africa

MEXICO

MARTIN DEL PALACIO LANGER in Mexico City

WHEN JAMAICAN referee Courtney Campbell whistled for the end of the World Cup qualifying match against USA, 110 million Mexicans could breathe a huge sigh of relief. The victory against their arch-rivals, the second in less than a month, meant survival in the final qualifying round on the road to South Africa 2010 but, above all, it allowed the football-crazy nation to watch their national team with pride for the first time in two years.

In a period that included four coaches, more than 50 players, defeats by Jamaica, Honduras and El Salvador, and an open war against the media, Mexico passed from being considered a candidate to be part of world football's elite to a laughing stock among their neighbours, who were presented with the perfect opportunity to avenge past defeats against the fallen giants.

After the disastrous period of Sven Goran Eriksson, the beginning of the cycle of his successor, Javier Aguirre, could not have been worse. A 2-1 defeat in El Salvador and questionable personnel choices – such as calling up veteran 36-year-old goalkeeper Oscar Perez – ended the brief honeymoon between the coach and the volatile Mexican media.

Since then, the situation has turned 180 degrees. Aguirre called up a youth squad for the Gold Cup, a tournament that Mexico hadn't won since 2003, and after a slow start – which included a three-match touchline ban for the coach after he kicked a Panama player – Mexico regained confidence with victories against Haiti and Costa Rica, and reached the Final against USA. Mexico hadn't beaten their opponents away from home in 10 years, so fans and journalists feared the worse.

But the match, played in New York, ended up being a recital of attacking football by *El Tri*. After a goalless first half, the young Mexicans, led by the inspired Giovani Dos Santos of Tottenham, destroyed their arch-rivals, thrashing them 5-0 – the biggest-ever victory for Mexico on American soil – with the 20-year-old playmaker named the competition's best player.

Winner...Sabah scores against USA

True barometer

With their first-choice squad resting following a successful campaign in the Confederations Cup, USA had fielded a weakened side in the Gold Cup. So the World Cup qualifier between the two teams in August, at the Azteca stadium, would be the true barometer of how far Aguirre's team had really progressed.

It had been years since a football match had created so much expectation in the country. With nearly 110,000 supporters in the stands, and tens of millions more watching on television, Mexico rapidly recovered from being one goal down in the 9th minute and secured a dramatic, but deserved, 2-1 victory with an 82nd-minute winner scored by Miguel Sabah, one of the players that Aguirre gave a debut to in the Gold Cup.

> "In Mexico, defeating USA is a question of national pride"

In Mexico, defeating USA is a question of national pride and thousands of fans took to the streets to celebrate a victory that was about so much more than just football. But the road to the World Cup finals is still rocky. A defeat against group leaders Costa Rica in San Jose in September would probably mean Aguirre's side will have to face a play-off against a South American team. An away victory, however, could almost put them on the plane to Africa.

A few months ago, nobody would have bet on Aguirre's boys. Today, the fickle Mexican fans are confident that the team will leave Central America with their heads held high and they are already rubbing their hands at the prospect of seeing the generation of Dos Santos, Carlos Vela, Guillermo Ochoa and Andres Guardado making history in 2010. ●

American oddity

LA Galaxy have lost faith in David Beckham, but everything will change if they make the play-offs

I SUPPOSE WE should have sussed this out right from the start. The very first David Beckham press conference, the one that started all the hoopla back in January 2007, was the give-away. The press conference was in Los Angeles; well, it was a Los Angeles club, Galaxy, that he was joining. But Beckham wasn't there.

And so started the US career of David Beckham, the Great Absentee. There followed two-and-a-half seasons during which Beckham has played sporadically and not particularly brilliantly. Injuries were a problem, but it soon became clear that his mind was elsewhere – and certainly not focused on Galaxy.

Beckham's priority was playing for England and trying to impress coach Fabio Capello enough to ensure a place in next year's World Cup squad. Incredibly, Galaxy – knowing full well that the more games Beckham played for England, the fewer he would play for them – were positively gleeful at the thought of him getting more caps. General manager Alexi Lalas could not contain his joy at the thought and even announced he would personally drive Beckham to the airport whenever he set off to play for England.

Celebrity status

Beckham the absentee footballer was always going to be overshadowed by Beckham the ever-present sexy shirt and underwear seller. His celebrity status worked wonders as Beckham shirts flew off the shelves in their thousands and the fans turned out to see him wherever Galaxy played.

But, more often than not, those same fans were let down because Beckham simply didn't play.

We have, thanks to Grant Wahl's excellent book, *The Beckham Experiment*, a nice account of Beckham's first appearance in a Galaxy shirt. It is worth a moment's study because it embodies the artificiality that has plagued so much of Beckham's presence in the US.

The game was a friendly against Chelsea. Beckham, far from fit, should not have played. But Galaxy fans were impatient to see him and – more to the point – television had been building the game up as an event. So a pact was arranged. Beckham would come on in the second half, and the Chelsea players wouldn't tackle him. Beckham duly wandered harmlessly to and fro for about half an hour with only one moment of excitement: when Chelsea's Steve Sidwell forgot, or hadn't understood, the instructions and went in hard. It looked bad, but luckily for the TV and marketing types – and a compliant Galaxy coaching staff – Beckham survived.

And so it continued throughout the 2007 and the 2008 seasons. He made mostly cameo appearances, but even when Beckham did manage a full 90 minutes there was not much to show for it. Galaxy were a poor team and he did little to improve them. A poor team, always excepting Landon Donovan – who did his best to carry them at least into the play-offs. That didn't work out in either 2007 or 2008, and that tells you quite a lot about the feeble contribution that Beckham made to Galaxy's fortunes.

Evidently Donovan was secretly smoldering at what he saw as Beckham's lack of effort. In Wahl's book, Donovan has some scathing things to say about Beckham. The most damning incident occurred at the end of the 2008 season when Galaxy, teetering on the verge of elimination from the play-offs but still with a slim mathematical chance of survival, travelled to Houston for a game they had to win to stay alive. As it happened, Beckham – who was the club captain – was suspended for the game...and so he simply did not bother to turn up, preferring to spend his time in England endorsing a food product and then returning direct to Los Angeles.

> **"Beckham the absentee footballer was always going to be overshadowed by Beckham the ever-present sexy shirt and underwear seller"**

Leadership? Professionalism? Commitment? It is that sort of behaviour, making it so clear that Beckham does not take Galaxy seriously, that has the fans – who have had their season-ticket prices jacked up because of a player they rarely see – so upset.

Then came Beckham's love affair with Milan, which spelled it out clearly to anyone who might have been left in any doubt. This view of matters has recently received the full backing of England coach Capello, who has also trashed MLS by proclaiming: "Beckham knows well that if he doesn't return to a big European championship in December he'll have no chance for the World Cup."

When Beckham made his belated – and surely reluctant – return to MLS in July he was greeted with boos and a banner calling him a fraud. It cannot be said that Beckham made even the slightest effort to appease the fans. It would have been so easy, so absurdly easy, for him to express his regret that things were not going well. Instead, he arrogantly announced he had nothing to apologise for. Beckham, it seems, is not only surrounded by ignorant advisors – they were the people who insisted on the disastrous appointment of Ruud Gullit as Galaxy coach – he is also cocooned in an impregnable ego.

It is doubtful that Beckham can

now shed his celebrity personality, doubtful that he will ever believe that he can make himself disliked. But that is precisely what he has done.

It is certainly true that Beckham's popularity is on the wane in the US. Three times he has played with Galaxy in New York. In 2007 there were 66,237 fans to watch him in Giants Stadium. In 2008 only 46,754 showed up. This year the crowd was 23,238.

Faced with this obvious fan disenchantment, MLS commissioner Don Garber had to say something. He turned philosophical, saying that the booing of Beckham showed that the fans cared.

Not much credit

This year it is more than likely that Galaxy will make the play-offs, but not much credit will fall to Beckham, who has missed nearly half the season.

Beckham keeps insisting that he is "committed" to Galaxy and that he will return for a fourth season in 2010. That is the year when he hopes to attain World Cup glory with England in South Africa – which, added to another spell with Milan (where new coach Leonardo has already said Beckham will be welcome) will mean another long absence from Galaxy.

But this is sport we're talking about. It is the most fickle and unpredictable of activities in a world in which winning is really all that matters. The whole Beckham scenario, so utterly wrong for the past two years, could suddenly come good should Galaxy have a successful play-off run and even win this year's MLS championship. That is quite possible as MLS is a league without a dominant team. Should that happen, even if Beckham only has a small role to play in it, it's unlikely that the boo boys will be heard from. ●

No more heroes...fans let their feeling be known once again as Beckham steps out in a friendly for LA Galaxy against Barcelona in August

Missing link

Xabi Alonso could be Real Madrid's most significant signing of the summer

THE EXIT REMAINS open, its doors flung wide, but the entrance to the Santiago Bernabeu has been closed and bolted. Five weeks, one transfer request and £30million later, Xabi Alonso finally joined Real Madrid from Liverpool. Kaka, Cristiano Ronaldo, Karim Benzema, Raul Albiol, Alvaro Negredo, Esteban Granero and Alvaro Arbeloa had all arrived before him as president Florentino Perez's spending climbed above £215m. Meanwhile, Ezequiel Garay – bought last summer but loaned back to former club Racing Santander – also appeared.

Nine new footballers had joined Real Madrid's revolution. There was still almost a month of the transfer window remaining but Madrid announced that their summer spending was over. Alonso was the last – but certainly not the least. In fact, his arrival is arguably the most significant of the lot. At least in terms of what it says about Madrid's project – that is, Madrid's footballing project. He could well be the player who really makes the difference.

Garay was already a Madrid player. Former B-team player Negredo was bought back from Almeria on preferential terms – just £4.5m for a player who scored 19 La Liga goals in a struggling side last season – with a view to selling him on for a profit. And Arbeloa is, in truth, little more than a defensive utility player, signed for a relatively cheap £3m.

Raul Albiol will have an important role at centre-back after joining from Valencia for £13m, but Madrid's defence was not the most pressing of their needs. Karim Benzema – whose £30m fee, rising to £35m, speaks volumes of the hopes Madrid have for him – is not the standard-bearer of the project. Madrid already have Gonzalo Higuain. And Raul.

Like Negredo, Granero was a former B-team player bought back for an exceptional price – not only did he cost just £3.5m from Getafe, he agreed to a pay cut to return to the club he'd originally joined as an 11-year-old. His signing provides midfield cover and maintained the pressure on Liverpool in Madrid's pursuit of Alonso. With Granero's arrival, Madrid attempted to convey the message that they did not necessarily need Alonso, preventing his price inflating still further.

The reality was that Madrid did need Alonso. They really needed him. By getting a fee believed to be in the region of £30m after Madrid insisted they would not go over £22m, Rafa Benitez has presented himself as the winner. The real winner, though, is Madrid coach Manuel Pellegrini.

It is no coincidence that Kaka and Ronaldo turned up first. Nor is it coincidence that they did so for a combined total of almost £150m, becoming two of the three most expensive players ever. Perez needed to make an impact, to bring the world's attention back to Madrid. They were the flagship of Florentino's return, the last two FIFA World Player winners.

Perez has talked of "investment players" and "cost players"; Kaka and Ronaldo belong firmly in the investment category, players who Perez says generate so much money that they are in fact cheap. (Whether that is actually true is another issue, of course). It is not that Madrid could afford to sign them; it is, he insists, more a case of they could not afford not to sign them. Privately, he told the board that Madrid would fail without Ronaldo and Kaka.

Just as vital

If Ronaldo and Kaka were central to Perez's project, Alonso was central to Pellegrini's project – and just as vital as Ronaldo. Alonso's signing represents a victory for the coach, for sporting director Miguel Pardeza and for the new executive director general Jorge Valdano. Together, they successfully persuaded Perez of the importance of signing Alonso despite the fact that, as a Spaniard who does not qualify for the 23 per cent tax band, and one who is not a self-financing galactico, he is expensive – a "cost player".

> "If Ronaldo and Kaka were central to Perez's project, Alonso was central to Pellegrini's"

Alonso's signing is a victory for footballing decisions and hints at a president who has learnt his mistakes from last time. It hints at a president who is listening to his coach and technical staff; at a president who, despite his initial reluctance, is prepared to spend big to get players whose strategic, business importance is limited. Just as importantly, it hints at a change in style and identity at Madrid, at a new approach. An improved one.

What unhappily defined Madrid last season was the way they played as much as the results they achieved. They went on a remarkable run in the league, winning 17 out of 18 games – even if the 6-2 hammering at home to Barcelona and a 4-0 defeat at Anfield came to encapsulate the season. The lack of fantasy, the lack of fluidity and the reliance on the counter-attack were the side's signature. Above all, there was a failure to dominate matches.

If the signings of Ronaldo and Kaka were important to the club's economic model – and Perez has rarely talked of anything else – the signing of Alonso is fundamental to their footballing one. In fact, "fundamental" is exactly the word that Pellegrini used.

He is determined that Madrid will keep possession and dominate games, that they will play the kind of football that his Villarreal side played: quick, mobile and tidy in possession. He believes that would have been impossible without Alonso. Guti and Fernando Gago do not cut it; Granero, while talented, is a level below Alonso; Wesley Sneijder has different characteristics; Rafael Van der Vaart is not good enough. While Ronaldo and Kaka are brilliant, and Benzema will score goals, who gets them the ball?

Now Madrid have a probable starting line-up that looks extraordinarily strong – in quality, in balance, in solidity. They have one of the world's best goalkeepers, an aggressive but intelligent defence

protected by a deep-lying midfielder who impressed hugely last season, plus incredible fantasy and firepower. Pellegrini believes that, in Alonso, they at last have the man that can link it all together, the player who can make it all work. It's the one thing they lacked. With his arrival, Madrid simply don't need anything else.

League rules

Their work is not done yet, though. League rules only allow for a 25-man squad and Madrid have over 30 players. Shipping out has proven rather harder than bringing in; when you're Real Madrid, it's not easy to persuade footballers to leave.

At the start of the summer, Madrid set a target of £90m in sales and alerted clubs to the fact that they were making nine players available. They sold Javier Saviola and Javi Garcia to Benfica for £4.3m and £6m respectively but, while those were unbelievably good fees, they have struggled to do such good business elsewhere. In fact, they have struggled to do any business at all. Particularly with their Dutch contingent.

Gabi Heinze was sold to Marseille for £1.3m and Dani Parejo joined Getafe for £2.6m (with a buy-back clause), but the only other sale confirmed is Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, who joined Milan for £13m. Trouble is, even that deal is not as good as it appears. How much Madrid will actually get is a moot point after reports suggesting that £6m of that will go to his former club Ajax – representing a £10m loss on a player Madrid had for six months.

In total, Madrid might just about have raised £26m, having so far failed to find homes for players such as Negredo, Van Der Vaart, Sneijder, Royston Drenthe, Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Arjen Robben – even though Pellegrini insists he does not want Robben or Sneijder to leave. And all the while, the rest of Europe bides its time, waiting for prices to tumble.

"Buy low, sell high" the maxim says; not for the first time, Madrid have turned the rules on their head. ●

Responsibility...Alonso is the man Madrid hope will pull it all together

Summer of discontent

Livingston are the latest casualties of the financial crisis that has hit Scottish football

SCOTLAND

DAN BRENNAN in Glasgow

THIS HAS BEEN a summer of discontent in Scotland as, for the second time in a decade, mayhem hit the Scottish Premier League's TV sponsorship deal, while the spectre of a financial crisis loomed and the national team's hopes of World Cup qualification suffered a major blow.

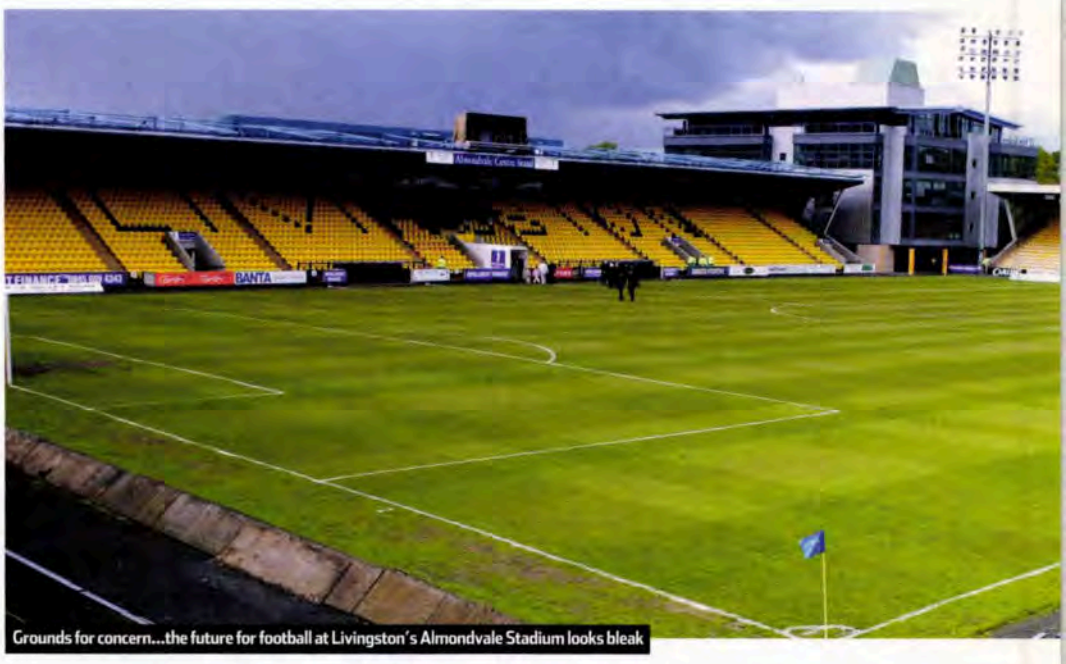
The dramatic collapse in June of Setanta – the SPL's main TV partners – left a black hole in the budgets of all the top-flight clubs. Worst affected were Celtic and Rangers, whose own club TV channels, linked to Setanta, were forced off the air, depriving tens of thousands of supporters of their £140-a-year subscription service.

The Glasgow rivals attempted to take matters into their own hands, forming an unholy alliance to bid for the TV rights themselves. However their efforts were rebuffed by the SPL, who instead agreed a new cut-price deal with media groups ESPN and Sky. Celtic chairman John Reid described the deal as "a disastrous misjudgement", adding that it would cost his club "a potential loss of up to £12million over the four-year period – the equivalent of around 6,500 season tickets each year".

Biggest casualty

However, the biggest individual casualty has been Livingston, who were placed in administration – for the second time in five years – and relegated from the First Division to the Third. Just last year, they came under new ownership when an Italian consortium purchased the club for £1.

But after West Lothian council took the club to court over an unpaid £330,000 – part of an overall debt in excess of £1m – it became clear the new owners were in no position to lead them back into the black and chairman Angelo Massone agreed to sell his 75 per cent stake to administrators Mazars for £25,000.



Grounds for concern...the future for football at Livingston's Almondvale Stadium looks bleak

It is a sad denouement for a club who, three years ago, were holding their own in the SPL. In the domino effect caused by their relegation, Airdrie United and Cowdenbeath were promoted to the First and Second Divisions respectively, throwing the fixture schedule into chaos just ahead of the start of the new season.

A consortium of local businessmen appeared to have thrown Livingston a lifeline, but they then said they would back down if the club was demoted to the fourth tier, and the administrators have described the Scottish Football League's punishment as the "death knell" for the club.

"You have to bear in mind what we were trying to do here," argues SFL chief executive David Longmuir. "We were trying to help a club to survive, and at the same time protect the integrity of the rule that was breached as well. That is really fundamental for the ongoing good of the game."

Donald McGruther, appointed interim manager on behalf of the administrators, was less optimistic, saying: "Unless I'm extremely lucky and the consortium is prepared to take a view that they can survive in the Third Division, I don't think it makes economic sense."

> **"HMRC have initiated a winding-up order that could lead Hearts to going the way of Livingston"**

One of Livi's biggest debts is to the Inland Revenue (HMRC), who have also been busy trying to extract unpaid dues from Heart of Midlothian, a club who, under their Lithuanian owners, have got playing brinkmanship with creditors down to a fine art. HMRC has initiated a winding-up order that could ultimately lead to Hearts following Livingston into administration, but the Tynecastle club – who last season twice failed to pay their own squad on time and who have debts estimated at £30m – insist they will have no problem settling their dues.

"Hearts has been informed of the

Blow...Morten Gamst Pedersen scores for Norway

petition that has been raised and that came as a surprise as the club has a payment schedule in place with HMRC and this will be met in full and to the agreed timescales," claimed director Sergejus Fedotovas.

"Mr [Vladimir] Romanov and his colleagues have taken things to the wire before as far as paying bills are concerned," mused former chairman George Foulkes. "So far, the club has survived, but it's certainly not good for the nerves."

Hopes that the national team would serve up some cheer by moving closer to World Cup qualification were dashed when they were beaten 4-0 in Oslo to Norway – a country that they had previously never lost away to. The scoreline could have been even worse, which exposed the lack of depth in the squad and left manager George Burley struggling for excuses.

Defeat to their main rivals for the runners-up spot leaves Burley's team now having to win their final two games at Hampden Park – against Macedonia and the runaway group winners, Holland – in order to keep their prospects of a play-off place for South Africa alive. ●

Jersey victorious

This year's Island Games tournament was the biggest yet

TWO DECADES AFTER it was first staged, the Island Games football tournament came of age in the Finnish isle of Aland as Jersey became the first team to lift the title three times.

With a record 16 teams taking part, Jersey – champions in 1993 and 1997 – beat the hosts 2-1 in a tense Final in front of 3,500 people at Mariehamn's Wiklof Holding Arena.

"It was a fantastic tournament and obviously a great result for us, especially as all the top teams were taking part," explains Jersey Football Association president Ricky Weir.

The Island Games football tournament has been held biannually since 1989, with the first two being won by Faroe Islands – before they began playing in FIFA competitions.

The Island Games Association has looser qualification rules than FIFA – the Falklands brought two Chileans and a Georgian to Aland – but 17 of Jersey's 18-man squad were born in the Channel Island, and the other player, Mark Lucas, moved to the island when he was two.

Jersey's Jean-Paul Martyn opened the scoring in the Final and Chris Andrews added a second on 54 minutes, before a late strike from Andreas Bjork set up a tense finish.

Aland hosted the Island Games in 1991 but this was their first Final appearance. Semi-pro side IFK Mariehamn are Aland's biggest club but they only supplied one player, Wilhelm Ingves, and he was injured before the Games started so his only involvement was to carry the flag at the opening ceremony. The rest of the squad were young players – the oldest was only 24 – from local clubs such as Hammarlands IK, Sunds IF and IF Finstroms Kamraterna, yet Aland still exceeded most expectations.

> "Seventeen of Jersey's 18-man squad were born on the island, with the other one moving there when he was two"

Champions...Jersey beat Aland 2-1 in the Final

Four groups

The 16 teams taking part were split into four groups, with the winners going straight into the semi-finals, where Jersey beat neighbours Guernsey 2-0 and the hosts overcame Isle of Man 2-1 after extra time. Guernsey then secured the bronze, thumping the Manxmen 5-0.

The remaining 12 islands played classification matches based on group finishes. Holders Gibraltar, who had been beaten to a semi-final spot by Guernsey, were ranked ninth overall after a 3-0 classification win over Isle of Wight.

Rhodes finished fifth with a 4-0 thrashing of Ynys Mon, while Minorca were seventh after a 4-1 win over Western Isles.

Greenland were hampered by the absence of captain Niklas Kreutzmann, a semi-professional with Danish side Aarhus Fremad who had exams, and Pelle Mortensen, a semi-pro at Odense who has gone travelling. They lost 4-0 to the hosts and 6-0 to Minorca, before an encouraging 3-1 win over 2005 winners Shetland Isles set them up for an 11th-place play-off. However, despite a Peri Fleischer brace and a Kaali Lund Mathiassen strike they lost 4-3 to Gotland.

Manager Jens Tang Olesen said: "Greenland football is going forward but the other teams are getting stronger. We need to be better, do our match training at a higher tempo and play more internationals."

The Shetlands beat the Estonian island of Saaremaa 3-2 to finish 13th, while the Falklands finished last after losing 3-1 to Norwegian isle Froya. ●

Bielsa's belief

Argentina's former coach is an unlikely hero across the border in Chile after steering their national team to the brink of World Cup qualification

CHILE

REX GOWAR

CHILEANS TEND TO look at Argentinians with a certain suspicion. Cross-border conflicts, typical of South America since the overthrow of the Spanish, have marred relations between the two countries separated by the Andes – a huge barrier in itself, with the highest peak outside the Himalayas.

All the more remarkable then that Harold Mayne-Nicholls, president of the Chilean FA, sought Marcelo Bielsa as coach of the national team, and that the former Argentina boss should become a national hero in Chile, transcending football to impress leading Chileans in other areas of life.

Bielsa, a reclusive, studious man who enjoys success but not the trappings, has been talked about by politicians, psychologists and newspaper columnists to name just a few. When he was discovered in the audience at a Santiago theatre, the applause for him at the final curtain was as loud as it was for the actors.

Mayne-Nicholls says it was his idea to persuade Bielsa, who had not worked since quitting the Argentina job in 2004 after six years, to take the Chile vacancy. "One likes to work with the best and he is one of the most talented trainers in the world," he explains. "Marcelo was available and I realised he was capable of doing a great job with our players. The manner in which he achieves his objectives is what interested us.

"The results were far better than we imagined. We hoped for a change in mentality in our players and that in time this would be reflected in results. But the change and results came at the same time. We have, after a long time, a concrete chance of qualifying for a World Cup. To that, add the way this team are playing.

"We are all very happy with how they play, how he plans the matches. Marcelo has become a true idol among the people, who are really grateful he accepted this challenge, and with his professionalism."

Bielsa, 54, youngest son of a middle-class, educated Argentinian family, and whose brother, Rafael, is the country's former foreign minister, has imbued Chile's players with a renewed belief, a winning mentality that has carried them to second place in the South American qualifying group for the 2010 World Cup.

Hard work comes first

He has got inside the skin of his players to get them to change, convincing them hard work comes first. The secret of his success is to keep sight of his long-term objectives and not let results affect his thinking.

Bielsa says it is in adversity he has learnt most about himself: "The best moments of my life, in which I have progressed, have to do with failure. Success is deforming, it relaxes one, it deceives, it makes us worse, it helps us to fall too much in love with ourselves."

Perhaps the key moment was going to Bolivia and Venezuela in mid-2008 with young players instead of more recognised regulars after a 3-0 home defeat by Paraguay in November 2007. Chile had four points from four matches, but Bielsa's eye to the long term, to developing a style of play for the team, brought two away wins.

The victories were followed by a 3-0 home loss to Brazil and a 4-0 win over Colombia in four days in September 2008. The team's record under Bielsa is good, but not brilliant. A 2-1 win away to Denmark in August made it 14 wins and 10 defeats in 29 games since taking charge in 2007.

> "Bielsa has got inside the skin of Chile's players, convincing them that hard work comes first"

The qualifying record is impressive, though. Chile are the team with most wins, eight in 14 matches, compared to seven each for group leaders Brazil and third-placed Paraguay, and they are the second-highest scorers with 23 goals, two fewer than Brazil.

Chile's players were once renowned for caring more for their celebrity lives than for wearing the red shirt of Chile. Since the generation that produced the brilliant Marcelo Salas and Ivan Zamorano reached the 1998 World Cup in France, the closest they have been to real success was an Olympic bronze medal at the Sydney Games in 2000 and third place at the 2007 Youth World Cup in Canada.

"Bielsa is the cornerstone of the future of Chilean football," says Mayne-Nicholls. "He's not just a coach, he drives all the changes we want in our sporting culture."

Hector Soto of Chilean newspaper *La Tercera*, wrote the following, in a vein not unlike the coach's own way of speaking: "Bielsa is an obsessive type who seeks, not unlike medieval alchemists who tried to find the philosopher's stone, the key to the internal equilibrium of the pitch. He seeks to turn each victory not into a matter of chance but the inevitable result of hard and rewarded professionalism.

"If he achieves the miracle [of reaching the World Cup] he will take a place Chileans reserve for their saints and heroes. That the man is Argentinian will be hard for our national pride, but in such matters no one should dwell on small things."

Back home in Argentina, fans who see Diego Maradona foundering as national team boss are proud of Bielsa doing well abroad, but also wonder how the Argentinian FA let him go. ●

Bielsa...the quiet, studious Argentinian loves success but hates the trappings that go with it

Mainz over matter

The Bundesliga new boys sacked their coach five days before the start of the new season

GERMANY

NICK BIDWELL in Munich

WHILE IT IS increasingly common nowadays for clubs to react to a poor start to a season by dispatching the coach to the gulag, Bundesliga newcomers Mainz have gone one better in the sacking stakes, showing the door to Norwegian boss Jorn Andersen five days before the start of the 2009-10 campaign. Trigger-happy stuff worthy of the *Guinness Book of Records*.

Andersen, feted only two months previously for guiding the Mainzer to promotion, had his fate sealed when his side embarrassingly lost 2-1 to regional league amateurs Lubeck in the first round of the German Cup. Not that the divorce was a shock to anyone who knows Mainz well.

Andersen was widely criticised last term for not having sufficient tactical awareness and rumours were rife of players turning rebellious. The final straw for the dressing room, it seems, was the dropping of captain and keeper Dimo Wache for the cup tie.

Given the circumstances, it was a remarkably amicable parting of the ways. Mainz general manager Christian Heidel explained matter-of-factly that Andersen's working methods simply did not suit the club. The latter agreed, apparently relieved to be heading for the exit. As successor to the much-loved Jurgen Klopp – now doing so ably at Borussia Dortmund and who must be a potential *Bundestrainer* – Andersen probably had come to the conclusion that he was never going to cohabit with that particular ghost.

To fill the vacancy, Heidel went for the in-house solution of Thomas Tuchel, who led the club's youth team to the national title last term. However, the 35-year-old faces the toughest of tough jobs: a Bundesliga baptism and survival mission with a squad many consider sub-standard.

Mainz were not the only elite side to fall victim to a cup giant-killing. Hannover also had their pride well and truly punctured, beaten 3-1 by Eintracht Trier, the fourth-tier side led by former Werder Bremen and Bayern Munich bad boy Mario Basler. Just two years ago, Trier were thumped 9-0 by Schalke at the same stage of the competition, but they proved anything but cannon fodder this time. Well organised and the first to almost every loose ball, they were immune from the sort of defensive lapses which plagued Hannover throughout.

Falling down on the job...Lubeck's Marcel Gebers (left) and Gamal Hamza of Mainz during the fateful German Cup clash

Yes, Hannover had an excuse of sorts as they were put on a swine-flu alert before the tie when youngster Hendrik Hahne was suspected of contact with a sufferer. But nothing, in truth, could justify their sloppy performance on the night.

It was a heaven-sent result for the ebullient Basler. He has never made any secret of his desire to take charge in the professional ranks and the intelligent way he orchestrated Hannover's downfall will have proved to many would-be employers that he is much, much more than a rent-a-quote, the fiery character always ready and willing to shoot from the lip.

Part-timers

Up against the part-timers of Munster, mighty Hertha Berlin required extra time to belatedly coast home 3-1, while Bayern Munich, pitching up at Hoffenheim's ground to play little Neckarelz of the sixth division, hardly covered themselves in glory in their 3-1 win. In the first half, the multimillion-pound Bayern attack barely threatened, but – no doubt prompted by some incendiary home truths from coach Louis Van Gaal – they at least discovered a modicum of resolve following the restart, breaking the match open thanks to a double from new striking acquisition Mario Gomez.

> "Andersen's fate was sealed when his side suffered an embarrassing defeat by amateurs Lubeck in the first round of the cup"

Worryingly for Van Gaal, however, the goalkeeping position continues to be a Bayern headache, with Michael Rensing badly at fault for Neckarelz's goal.

Gomez, Germany's player of the year in 2007, came runner-up in this year's poll – organised by the national sportswriters' union – no less than 160 votes adrift of the comfortable winner, Wolfsburg's Brazilian striker Grafite, whose 28 goals last season underpinned his club's totally unexpected league title.

Joining a list of greats such as Uwe Seeler, Franz Beckenbauer, Gerd Muller, Lothar Matthaus and Michael Ballack, Grafite also became only the third foreigner to claim the prize, the others being Franck Ribery in 2008 and compatriot Ailton in 2004.

Inevitably, former Wolfsburg boss Felix Magath – now with Schalke – scooped the coach of the year award, while Beckenbauer was voted the player of the last half-century, polling three times as many votes as his closest rival, Seeler. ●

Losing their way

The national side is struggling to qualify for next summer's World Cup

PORTUGAL

PEDRO PINTO in Lisbon

JUNE 2009. It's injury time in Tirana and, with the score at 1-1, Portugal know that they are effectively on the brink of elimination from the 2010 World Cup.

Another long ball is floated into Albania's penalty area and, as the goalkeeper fails to hold the ball, Porto centre-back Bruno Alves appears at the back post to head in, cueing wild celebrations on the visitors' bench. It's as if they have just beaten Brazil in the World Cup Final.

How the mighty have fallen. The Euro 2004 Final seems like a distant memory. The glory days of Luiz Felipe Scolari's reign are over and this is a team looking for a new identity and desperately aiming to regain its winning touch.

With one win in their opening five World Cup qualifiers, anything but a victory against Albania would have left Portugal with virtually no hope of qualifying. The team now find themselves in third place in the Group One standings, behind Denmark and Hungary, and level on points with Sweden.

Sheer agony...Cristiano Ronaldo can't believe it as another chance goes begging in Tirana

> **"Portugal's downfall began with the retirement of Luis Figo. More than a world-class footballer, he was their most inspirational, influential player over the last decade"**

Considering the team's success in the previous four years, this predicament is unthinkable. After all, this is a country which reached the Final of Euro 2004 and the semi-finals of the World Cup two years later. Plus, this is a team boasting the talents of the world player of the year, Cristiano Ronaldo, plus other stars of European football such as Ricardo Carvalho, Nani and Ricardo Quaresma.

However, a closer look at the developments which followed Scolari's departure tells a story of transition and a lack of identity that has made Carlos Queiroz's job as coach challenging in many ways.

Portugal's downfall began with the retirement of Luis Figo. More than a world-class footballer, the winger was the side's most inspirational and influential player over the last decade. Even if, in his final games with the national team, he lacked the pace that once made him unstoppable, Figo was still the man everyone looked for when searching for solutions on the pitch. And nine times out of 10, he would deliver.

Queiroz has struggled

As if losing their most influential playmaker wasn't enough, Portugal also had to make do without their top scorer of all time, Pauleta. Although ineffective in major tournament finals, the Azorean was deadly in qualifying. He racked up 47 goals in 88 games over nine years and gave the national team crucial victories all over Europe. Since Pauleta retired, Queiroz has struggled to find a replacement – Nuno Gomes is past his best, while Hugo Almeida has yet to hit his stride at international level.

Last but not least, there was the impact that Scolari's departure had on the squad. Many criticised the Brazilian for a lack of tactical expertise and his reluctance to experiment with new formations, but Big Phil was still a great motivator and a genuine leader. Players like Ronaldo saw him as a second father, and his ability to keep his top stars focused and committed cannot be underestimated.

So although that injury-time winner against Albania kept Portuguese hopes of qualifying alive, there are still many challenges ahead for a nation trying to avoid the prospect of sitting out the 2010 World Cup. There are four matches left and all must be won if Ronaldo and co are to book their tickets to South Africa. ●

Saudi World Cup showdown beckons

Bahrain get a second 'once in a lifetime' chance

AMID A HAIL of plastic bottles, Bahrain's national team lay scattered across the pitch of the National Stadium in Manama. Some were slumped, others stood with their hands on their hips, while one player appeared to be crying as photographers buzzed around his disconsolate team-mates.

On the other side of the pitch the opposition embarked on a frenzied, euphoric celebration. As the crowd began to drift away, a palpable mixture of anger and incredulity was dragged with them into the night as the realisation set in that Bahrain had just missed out on what was perhaps a once-in-a-lifetime chance to reach the 2006 World Cup finals.

After a mammoth qualifying campaigns which consisted of 17 games, a solitary goal by Dennis Lawrence of Trinidad and Tobago had seen Bahrain fall at the final hurdle in a winner-takes-all play-off which sent the Caribbean side to Germany the following summer.

Bahrain would have been the smallest nation ever to have made the finals had they qualified and they could be forgiven for thinking they would never come so close again. However, having beaten Uzbekistan in June to take third place in their 2010 World Cup qualifying group, they now face arch-rivals Saudi Arabia in another play-off, with the winner to play New Zealand for a place at next year's tournament in South Africa.

The man leading the charge this time around is Milan Macala, and the 66-year-old is something of an old hand when it comes to Middle East football. The Czech tactician has coached in Kuwait, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Oman, and has been in charge of the Bahrain national team for two years – which is quite an achievement in these parts, given that Iraq, for instance, have gone through seven coaches in the same period.

Macala, though, has grown thick skin over the years, taking charge of six national teams, winning the Gulf Cup twice and being unceremoniously sacked from almost every job he's had. With Bahrain he has overseen a talented pool of players and, more importantly, inherited a passion for the game that has allowed the country to punch above its weight compared to several regional rivals.

High-profile countries such as Qatar and UAE, for example, may have won regional tournaments – the former the Asian Games, the latter the Gulf Cup – but their success has always been on home soil. In the heat of World Cup qualification, both have wilted despite huge amounts of money being poured into the game.

Dubai has pumped millions of dollars into football at home and abroad – a professional domestic league began last season and Abu Dhabi bought Premier League side Manchester City – but UAE still finished bottom of their qualification group. Qatar also spent big, even resorting to naturalising South American players in a bid to progress, but a 1-0 defeat against Bahrain ended their World Cup qualification hopes.

Footballing culture

As far as Macala is concerned it is not the money that's important – after all, Bahrain is the poorest of the Gulf nations. Rather, it is the fact that the country has a far deeper and more sincere footballing culture.

"They have talented players here. They have speed, sure, but what is most important is that they play football every day," he says. "On every patch of sand they are putting goals up and playing five, six-a-side.

"Bahrain is small, only 700,000 people, but they have talent and also have motivation because this is not a rich country. It's not like in Saudi Arabia or the [United Arab] Emirates. Here they are trying to find a future for the sport."

> "Bahrain would have been the smallest nation ever to have reached the World Cup finals"

Despite having to work with a relatively limited pool of players, Macala has built upon the team he took over, drafting in players from the Under-23 Olympic squad. Now he has a team that is attracting the attention of European scouts, with Jaycee John, an naturalized Nigerian, already playing overseas for Mouscron and midfielder Abdulla Fatadi having joined Swiss club Neuchatel Xamax this summer.

"We have two or three players that are interesting foreign clubs," admits Macala. "Jaycee John plays in Belgium and there has been interest from Turkey. It is important to have contact with European football. Jaycee knows what it's like to be professional, to train twice a day."

Add to the mix experienced players such as Salman Isa, the marauding wing-back who scored the winning goal against Japan earlier this year in an Asian Cup qualifier, striker A'ala Hubail and free-kick specialist Mahmood Abdulrahman, who scored the deciding goals home and away against Uzbekistan, and Bahrain look better equipped to reach the finals this time than four years ago.

Despite his side's progress to the play-offs, Macala is loathe to be drawn on their chances of qualification, saying: "I don't want to talk about the World Cup, only the next game. Every game gives us experience."

But while he may claim that it's all about building for the future, talk to any Manama taxi driver and they will tell you exactly what Bahrainis think of play-off opponents Saudi Arabia.

The two countries are connected by the King Fahd Causeway, a short drive for frustrated Saudi men wanting to drink and raise a little hell in their relatively liberal neighbour. Religion plays its part too, with Saudi Arabia a Wahhabi Sunni state and Bahrain a largely Shia country ruled by a Sunni royal family that doesn't exactly enjoy universal support.

The two-leg play-off – starting in Manama on September 5, with the return in Riyadh four days later – will be explosive, and Bahrain might even have time to shoot themselves in the foot beforehand too, with the FA dithering over the coach's contract.

But Macala or no Macala, those fans who trudged home four years ago, and the players who lay shattered on the turf as their opponents celebrated, are determined to make up for that disappointment. ●

On their way...Abdulla Omar (left) and Abdulla Al Dakeel after June's victory against Uzbekistan

Changing places

The biggest beneficiaries of a recent change in the FIFA statutes on nationality will be African countries

AFRICAN COUNTRIES are looking to profit from another change to the FIFA statutes which has further eased restrictions on players seeking to switch footballing nationality. The age limit at which players had to make a choice has been removed, letting a handful of players claim a new international career.

The vast majority of those to benefit will be players born in Europe but of African descent, whose skills will now be available to national sides across Africa. The first five players to benefit did so during the round of international fixtures in August, just after the expiry of the 60-day hiatus before the law could take effect.

All were former France youth internationals who had not gone on to play for *Les Bleus* at senior level and who were now seeking to throw their lot in with the countries of their parents' birth. Previously they had been unable to make the switch because they had not applied to FIFA for the change before turning 21.

Since 2003, players capped at junior level had been allowed to switch countries but only if they are entitled to dual nationality, had made no international appearances and were under 21. But Tottenham Hotspur's Sebastien Bassong, Rennes duo Lucien Aubey and Moussa Sow, Nice's Matt Moussilou and Lazio midfielder Mourad Meghni have now become full internationals, with several others likely to join their ranks before the end of the year.

The desire to have Meghni play for Algeria was the catalyst for the change and it was the north African country which brought the proposal for dropping the age limit to the 2009 FIFA Congress in Bahamas. Despite some strong opposition, they saw it passed.

"We didn't think it was fair that players [of African origin] were being selected for junior teams of European countries and then never getting a chance to play at full international level. Our proposal was to give freedom to these players to have a right to choose," explains Algeria FA chief Mohamed Raouraoua, who was the architect of the proposal.

"Having these players is a huge benefit for us and many other African teams. Since 2003 we have had access to many quality players who have vastly improved our team. It improves the African game as a whole."

Algeria now hope to add Benfica's Hassan Yebda, a former France Under-17 international, to their squad for September's vital World Cup qualifier at home to Zambia.

The end for Song?

But Bassong's selection for Cameroon could ironically abruptly end the distinguished career of the country's iconic captain, Rigobert Song. For his first match in charge, the Indomitable Lions' new coach, Paul Le Guen, dropped the veteran Song and played Bassong instead.

Paris-born Moussilou was man of the match as Congo drew away to Morocco, while Aubey was also in the side, and 31-year-old Guingamp midfielder Christian Bassila, who has played in the past for West Ham and Sunderland, is likely to be the next to join Congo's ranks. Meanwhile, Sow made his debut for Senegal in the friendly win over the Democratic Republic of Congo in France.

Morocco will now try to persuade several players to join them. These include German-born striker Mimoun Azaouagh of Bochum, and Dutch-born pair Nordin Amrabat and Otman Bakkal of PSV Eindhoven. Former Germany youth internationals now available to African sides will include the Boateng brothers (Kevin-Prince of Tottenham and Hamburg's Jerome), whose father is from Ghana, as well as Dennis Aogo, also of Hamburg, who is of Nigerian descent.

Nigeria could also sound out Manchester City's Nedum Onuoha and Shola Ameobi of Newcastle, both capped by England at Under-21 level, while Senegal have their eye on Jacques Faty of Sochaux, captain of the France Under-17 side which won the world championship in 2001.

New shirt...Bassong (left) has represented France and Cameroon

> "A handful of players can now claim a whole new international career"

Ideally, says Raouraoua, there should be a further change to the statutes to allow players to switch allegiance even if they have played at full international level but have then not been capped again for more than three years. The Algerians cite the case of Monaco midfielder Camel Meriem, capped four times by France between 2004 and 2005 then cast into the international wilderness.

Such a change would open the door for other ex-France internationals such as Wigan's Olivier Kapo and Peguy Luyindula of Paris Saint-Germain (DR Congo), plus Ousmane Dabo of Lazio and PSG's Zoumana Camara (both Senegal).

However, Raouraoua reckons it is unlikely, admitting: "I don't think FIFA would want to contemplate a situation where a footballer appears at a World Cup finals for one country and then returns in the colours of another." ●

Lost in translation

Foreign coaches are struggling to make an impact in the Russian league

RUSSIA

VICTOR GUSEV in Moscow

THREE THOUSAND Zenit fans were at Saint Petersburg airport to wave goodbye to Dick Advocaat. Hundreds of orange balloons, fireworks and a banner reading "thank you our General" brought the 61-year-old Dutch coach to tears – and not for the first time in his three-year spell with one of the country's most popular football clubs.

Previously, though, it had been tears of joy in Advocaat's eyes as Zenit found unprecedented success. They won the 2007 Russian Premier League – repeating the club's only previous victory of 1984 – and that was followed in 2008 by a UEFA Cup triumph and a European Super Cup win over Manchester United. These feats made the Dutchman the most successful coach in the club's history.

Advocaat's contract with Zenit was supposed to last until the end of the year, when he was due to take charge of the Belgium national team, but he was dismissed in mid-August after a humiliating home defeat by lowly Tomsk – a fourth successive game without victory that saw Zenit drop to seventh in the league.

However, blaming the club's woes on Advocaat makes little sense as Zenit failed to find proper replacements for Andrei Arshavin, who was sold to Arsenal, captain Anatoliy Timoshchuk, now at Bayern Munich, and Portuguese playmaker Danny, who is out injured until the end of the season.

The only noteworthy arrival was Torino's Alessandro Rosina, but Advocaat criticised that signing and even blamed Zenit's new sports director Igor Korneev (who is Guus Hiddink's assistant on the national team) for going behind his back.

The warm farewell accorded to Advocaat was a sign of the fans' deep gratitude to him as well as an understanding that the club have long-term problems that need to be addressed. What makes the situation slightly peculiar is that Advocaat has accepted an offer from another side, Khimki, to act as a consultant until the end of the year. Khimki are coached by Konstantin Sarsania, formerly a scout for Zenit under Advocaat.

> "The warm farewell accorded to Advocaat was a sign of the fans' deep gratitude and understanding that their club have long-term problems"

Advocaat's departure was the third dismissal of a western European coach this year. Former Denmark star Michael Laudrup did not even last a year with Spartak Moscow, while Jurgen Rober returned to Germany after nine months with Saturn.

Mentality and language

Difficulty in understanding the Russian mentality and language are cited among the main reasons why foreign coaches do not last long in this country. Having to deal with unnamed team owners and a criminal aura around some of the clubs, coaches often get frustrated, despite the generous contracts on offer.

However, Miodrag Bozovic is an example of how things can work. The 41-year-old, 6ft 5in Montenegrin who calls himself "the world's tallest soccer coach", enjoys great popularity with the media, fans and players for his good Russian, friendly attitude and, of course, good results. Having lifted Amkar Perm to fourth place and a Europa League berth last year, he moved to FC Moscow and has turned them into league favourites.

CSKA Moscow's Brazilian coach Zico had been welcomed with open arms, but initially he struggled to get results. Ironically, things improved for Zico when he reverted to the tactics used by his predecessor, Valeri Gazzaev, who had left CSKA for a well-paid position at Dynamo Kyiv where he replaced Yuri Semin, who returned to Lokomotiv Moscow.

Other appointments have seen a new generation take up coaching positions. Spartak Moscow's Valery Karpin rejoined the club as a general director in 2008 and was supposed to look for Laudrup's replacement. Instead he decided to take the job himself, even though he does not have a coaching licence. One of Karpin's first moves was to invite his old boss, Oleg Romantsev, back as a consultant.

Another newcomer is Andrei Gordeyev. The 34-year-old former Dynamo Moscow defender moved up from Saturn's reserves as a temporary replacement for the unfortunate Rober, but excellent results in his first few games in charge may see him get the job on a permanent basis.

Meanwhile, back at Zenit, reserve-team coach Anatoli Davydov took temporary charge of team affairs following Advocaat's departure. However, the club were reported to be negotiating terms with a well-known Italian manager. ●

Crying shame...Zenit fans were sad to see Advocaat go

Anger management

The bitter rivalry between Basle and Zurich produced an early-season flashpoint...but not one you might have imagined

SWITZERLAND

BRIAN HOMEWOOD in Berne

SWISS FOOTBALL has apparently never seen anything like it. Basle goalkeeper Franco Costanzo had what can best be described as "an Oliver Kahn moment" when he grabbed his own team-mate by the hair following the 1-1 draw at home to FC Zurich in the season's first meeting between the two bitter rivals.

The Basle captain and former Argentina youth international lost his temper with defender Beg Ferati as the final whistle went and television pictures showed Costanzo remonstrating furiously with Ferati, who pushed him away and, in doing so, enraged the keeper even more. The keeper then put his hand on Ferati's head and grabbed him by the hair before team-mates and a Zurich player came in to separate the feuding pair.

The way in which Costanzo manhandled Ferati was reminiscent of the infamous moment when Kahn grabbed Bayer Leverkusen striker Thomas Brdaric by the neck during a Bundesliga match in 2002.

Not surprisingly, the scenes caused consternation in a country where using the vacuum cleaner at an inappropriate time can earn a ticking off from the neighbours.

"These scenes are unheard of in Swiss football," commented the tabloid newspaper *Blick*, while Basle immediately ordered Costanzo to pay an undisclosed amount to a programme which promotes responsible fan behaviour.

"He lost his composure in an unacceptable way and overstepped the legitimate emotional boundaries," read a club statement. "The club will not accept its own players giving a bad example on or near the field of play."

Costanzo immediately came out to face the TV cameras and apologised, saying: "Everyone who knows me knows that it's the first time in my career I've done a stupid thing like this. I have made a big mistake which, of course, I cannot excuse. This will never happen again."

Head case...captain Costanzo loses his cool with Ferati

Basle also fined striker Alex Frei, the national team's all-time record scorer, after he petulantly got himself sent off in injury time. Frei, signed from Borussia Dortmund at the start of the season, was booked and then, furious at the decision, threw the ball at Johan Vonlanthen to earn himself a second yellow card.

Fierce rivalry

Vonlanthen had given Zurich an 87th-minute lead but Benjamin Huggel fired in the equaliser from a Frei backheel two minutes later. Zurich had been reduced to 10 men early in the second half when Alain Rochat was sent off.

The two clubs share one of the fiercest rivalries in Switzerland. The most notorious incident happened after Zurich won 2-1 at Basle to clinch the 2005-06 championship at the expense of their opponents. Furious Basle fans stormed onto the pitch and attacked visiting players who were celebrating.

> **"Basle and Zurich players had to pull the battling pair apart"**

There was more trouble in May, when Basle won 1-0 at Zurich, a result which was not enough to prevent the hosts eventually clinching the title. Basle fans again invaded the pitch and both teams were ordered to play one home match behind closed doors.

Ivory Coast striker Seydou Doumbia, last season's top scorer in the league with 20 goals, is in prolific form once again this term, scoring six times in the first six games for early pace-setters Young Boys Berne.

Meanwhile, the country's most successful club, Grasshopper, were struggling near the bottom of the 10-team table after losing four of their opening games. ●

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ANDERLECHT (BLG)

History boys

Europe has given *Les Mauves* some great moments, but it was all such a long time ago

All action...Van Damme

THE Brussels club's European glory days – when they won the Cup-winners Cup in 1976 and 1978, and the UEFA Cup in 1983 – seem so far away. These days Sporting, as they are commonly known in Belgium, lag behind the continental pacesetters and they even struggle domestically, finishing runners-up to Standard for the last two seasons.

After coming up well short in May's two-legged title play-off, Anderlecht fans have been clamouring for general manager Herman Van Holsbeeck to spend big and often, only for him to ignore the calls. The only new arrival of note is young Czech central defender Ondrej Mazuch (on loan from Fiorentina), while keeper Silvio Proto has returned from a temporary stint with Beerschot to deputise for usual first-choice Daniel Zitka, who is still feeling the effects of a game late in 2008 when he broke a leg, damaged ankle ligaments and fell off the stretcher.

Les Mauves have other worries. Defender Jelle Van Damme has told club officials he wants to move on, key Argentinian defensive midfielder Lucas Biglia is also looking for a get-out clause, while his compatriot striker Nicolas Frutos is struggling with a persistent Achilles' problem.

Hope comes in the form of young guns such as Senegalese left-sided midfielder Christophe Diandy and striker Romelu.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ARIEL JACOBS (SINCE NOVEMBER 2007)
Former Molenbeek and La Louviere boss who was promoted from assistant coach following Franky Vercauteren's sacking. Good at concocting a defensive game plan, though not so inspiring offensively.

THE PLAYER
MBARK BOUSSOUFA
Small, gifted and busy, the Moroccan can make chances out of nothing.

JACOBS LOOKS TO WIDE BOYS

Whereas last season Jacobs alternated between a 3-4-3 and 4-2-3-1, he now looks to go with a 4-3-3. This relies, to a large extent, on the artistry of the attacking wide men: livewire Boussoufa and Matias Suarez, who has rediscovered his form this summer following a soporific first season in Brussels.

APOEL NICOSIA (CYP)

On the up and up

The Cypriot champions are doing their bit to demonstrate that the island's teams are getting stronger

Celebrations...Partizan are beaten

CYPRIOT football is improving fast and reigning champions APOEL underlined the current boom by knocking out Partizan Belgrade, 2-1 on aggregate, in the third qualifying round; a result that owed absolutely nothing to luck – just heart, desire, solid organisation and some much-underestimated technical ability.

And it would appear that top Serb sides especially appeal to them as they accounted for former European champions Red Star Belgrade last season.

While their main domestic rivals (Omonia and Anorthosis) had a revolving-door transfer policy at the start of last term, APOEL showed more restraint and were rewarded for their stability with a record 20th league title. The recruitment policy this summer was also one of evolution rather than revolution, with the club's top brass convinced they have added considerable quality in the shape of Macedonia centre-back Boban Grncarov (who was on loan at Maccabi Petah Tikva in Israel last season) from Belgian side Gent, Slovakia attacking midfielder Mario Breska from Nurnberg, and diminutive Polish striker Adrian Sikora, formerly with Real Murcia in the Spanish second division.

Sikora will team up on the Mediterranean island with a couple of compatriots in midfielder Kamil Kosowski and marksman Marcin Zewlakow.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
IVAN JOVANOVIC (SINCE JANUARY 2008)
In two spells at APOEL, the 47-year-old Serb has guided the club to the championship twice. A fine motivator and not one to worry about his rearguard sitting too deep.

THE PLAYER
DIONISIS CHIOTIS
After falling out of favour at AEK Athens, the Greek keeper's career looked to be going nowhere until he joined APOEL and turned things around.

KEEPING IT TIGHT AT THE BACK

APOEL's strong point is their stingy defence. A well-drilled back six are very much at home soaking up pressure and waiting for the right moment to cash in with a swift counter. When chasing a game, coach Jovanovic will turn to a two or even three-man front-line consisting of Zewlakow, Sikora and Nenad Mirosavljevic.

ARSENAL (ENG)

A waiting game

Arsenal still crave European success but Arsene Wenger will not be panicked into big-name signings

Class act...Arshavin

DEFEAT by Barcelona in the 2006 Champions League Final remains the closest Arsenal have come to European success under Arsene Wenger. But after four years without any silverware, a trophy of any sort would be a success for the Gunners this season.

The Frenchman continues to be a canny operator in the transfer market and this summer Arsenal banked £40million from the sale of Emmanuel Adebayor and Kolo Toure to Manchester City. But Wenger still has to operate under severe financial constraints – a direct result of the costly move to the Emirates stadium and continued boardroom troubles.

He also remains committed to youth, though the latest crop of youngsters – who include France midfielder Abou Diaby and English teenager Jack Wilshere – would benefit greatly from an experienced midfield enforcer.

The fans, who pay some of the highest ticket prices in English football, would also welcome a big-name signing but Wenger may well feel he can do without such arrivals, given the return from injury of Brazilian-born striker Eduardo and Czech Republic midfielder Tomas Rosicky.

Above all, Wenger remains committed to entertaining, attacking football and, if anything, the departure of Adebayor will only serve to reaffirm his commitment to Arsenal's neat, close-passing style.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ARSENE WENGER (SINCE OCTOBER 1996)
Now in his 14th season in England, the Frenchman has stamped his personality and philosophy all over Arsenal.

THE PLAYER
CESC FABREGAS
The Spain midfielder missed crucial parts of last season through injury but underlined his importance to the club on his return. Barcelona and Real Madrid would love to buy him.

WENGER TO CONTINUE WITH NEW APPROACH

In pre-season matches, Arsenal experimented with a 4-3-2-1 variation on Wenger's trusty 4-4-2. The system gives more room to accommodate attacking spirits like Andrei Arshavin, Theo Walcott and Rosicky, but also allows for defensive solidity in midfield, assuming the flanks are not overrun.

ATLETICO MADRID (SPA)

The bigger picture

Progress in the Champions League may be the club's only hope of holding on to their big names

In demand...Aguero

ASSUMING they overcome Panathinaikos in the fourth qualifying round, Atletico can again be expected to frustrate and delight in equal measure.

Coach Abel Resina is still in charge because they squeezed into the Champions League by finishing fourth last season, but he was only intended to be a stop-gap appointment following the sacking of Javier Aguirre – who had steered Atletico into the Champions League knockout round from a potentially tricky group containing Liverpool, Marseille and PSV, only to be undermined by poor results in the domestic league.

While Atletico are a model of stability compared with the days of former president Jesus Gil, the directors are still trigger-happy, with many in Spain considering Resina to be a dead man walking.

Predictions about Atletico's European fortunes this season are also complicated by the uncertainty surrounding the future of Sergio Aguero. If Atletico were to drop into the Europa League, Aguero's future in Madrid would again come under scrutiny.

With Aguero, Atletico can boast an outstanding front line that also includes Diego Forlan. But all too often, Atletico have been let down by a poor defence. The signing of talented Spain Under-21 keeper Sergio Asenjo, as well as centre-back Juanito from Betis, suggests things could be tightened up this season.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ABEL RESINA (SINCE FEBRUARY 2009)
Former Atleti goalkeeper who took over midway through last season following the sacking of Aguirre and steered the club into fourth place. Has never seemed like a long-term solution.

THE PLAYER
SERGIO AGUERO
Assuming he stays, the Argentina starlet, who is Diego Maradona's son-in-law, will be the main inspiration of Atletico's attack.

DEFENCE NEEDS TO BE BETTER

Without doubt Atletico have an outstanding front four in Maxi Rodriguez, Aguero, Forlan and Simao. However, they are far too often let down by a poor defence. New keeper Asenjo and centre-back Juanito might help to improve matters at the back, but Atletico fans will not be holding their breath.

AZ ALKMAAR (Hol)

Optimistic outlook

Newcomers have their sights set on the knockout stage in their Champions League debut

In with a shout...AZ

IT was 28 years ago that AZ had their only previous European Champions Cup campaign when, after a relatively easy 4-1 aggregate win against Norway's Start Kristiansand, the Alkmaar club were beaten 5-4 by Liverpool. But it was a close call and, after a 2-2 draw in the home leg, it was only a late Alan Hansen strike that sealed the result in the return.

Despite that limited experience on the highest level, there is huge optimism, stirred up by chairman Dirk Scheringa, that last year's Dutch champions will go one better and reach the quarter-finals.

With that goal in mind, Scheringa hired Ronald Koeman – a former Champions League winner with Barcelona who is familiar with Europe and the "result-first way of playing" – to suceed Louis Van Gaal.

Koeman has inherited a young, talented and well-balanced team in which almost every player seems to be replaceable by an equal squad member. Even the departure of international Demy De Zeeuw to Ajax shouldn't be too much of a major problem.

Only defender Kew Jaliens and reserve keeper Joey Didulica have played in the Champions League before but, if they can hold onto Moussa Dembele and Mounir El Hamdaoui until the transfer window closes, Koeman's side should do well – though time will tell if optimism has been confused with realism in Alkmaar.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
RONALD KOEMAN (SINCE MAY 2009)
Eager to get his coaching career back on track after being fired at Valencia. Should give AZ the Champions League experience the team so badly misses.

THE PLAYER
STIJN SCHAARS
International, skipper and motivator of the team. Was seen by Van Gaal as a key player in AZ's hierarchy, though often out through injury.

VERSATILE DUTCH HAVE OPTIONS

AZ normally play a 4-4-2 system with Stijn Schaars and David Mendes Da Silva forming the midfield heart. El Hamdaoui will play behind the main striker in Europe, and Dembele could even play on the wing, leaving Jeremain Lens, Ari or Graziano Pelle up front. In defence, Koeman has plenty of options.

BARCELONA (SPA)

Same again?

Last season's record-breaking treble could only be topped by lifting Europe's biggest prize in the arch-rivals backyard

New face...Maxwell

CAN Barca possibly repeat their feat of last season when they celebrated the historic treble of Spanish League, Spanish Cup and Champions League? Morever, they did so playing expansive, attacking football that earned unfettered praise from wide-eyed plaudits.

Yet, towards the end of last season, Barcelona were running on empty, disrupted by injuries and their campaign almost came off the rails. Pep Guardiola's tactics made them vulnerable in the domestic league, where they were nearly caught by Real Madrid, who were able to grind out 1-0 wins.

Hence the signing this summer of Zlatan Ibrahimovic from Internazionale. The Swede's arrival made sense for the club's directors, who were able to offer a galactico to rival those being presented in Madrid. For Guardiola, Ibrahimovic gives him a plan B, a target man who can receive and control a more direct long pass.

Guardiola is also conscious of the need for an extra midfielder because he will lose Yaya Toure and Seydou Keita to the African Nations Cup in January and February, but – with Arsenal and Liverpool having seen off respective enquiries for Cesc Fabregas and Javier Mascherano – no other big-name signings have been forthcoming.

Yet despite this, Barcelona remain the team that everybody else will have to beat in order to triumph in Madrid next May.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
JOSEP GUARDIOLA (SINCE JULY 2008)
Last May he became only the sixth man to win the Champions League as a player and coach – after just 10 months in the Nou Camp hot seat.

THE PLAYER
LIONEL MESSI
Further outstanding performances in the early group stage games will see the Argentina star crowned as the world's best player in December.

BARCA TO STICK TO THEIR BEAUTIFUL GAME

Barca's 4-3-3 has a familiar look to it; the only differences to last season are Ibrahimovic, as the central striker, and at left-back, where new signing Maxwell from Internazionale could step in, but Rafael Marquez's return from injury could force Carles Puyol wide. Xavi and Iniesta are the key to a short-passing game.

BAYERN MUNICH (GER)

Home concerns

Bundesliga success could be higher on Van Gaal's agenda than making amends for last season's European exit

Fight...Bayern need to restore pride

DESPITE an excellent pedigree in this competition – winners four times, runners-up on three occasions – Bayern are likely to regard Europe as more dessert than main course over the coming months. As much as the Bavarians love a continental midweek scrap, a more pressing concern is to rebuild their domestic hegemony after relinquishing the Bundesliga title to Wolfsburg last season.

The ball and chain around the Bayern ankle is that they are a team in transition. Not only will new coach Louis Van Gaal need time to reconfigure, he also has the far from simple task of working a half-dozen bright and shiny summer signings into the mix, including top-class performers such as ex-Stuttgart striker Mario Gomez and Ukraine midfielder Anatoliy Tymoshchuk.

The willingness of France midfield star Franck Ribery to go that extra mile may also be open to question too if, as looks likely, he remains at the Allianz Arena.

Bayern are nowhere near as well endowed in defence, where Edson Braafheid from Twente, rookie central defender Holger Badstuber and goalkeeping rivals Hans-Jorg Butt and Michael Rensing have it all to prove.

A place in the last eight would more than satisfy, as is the need to preserve dignity. A 5-1 aggregate hammering by Barcelona in last season's quarter-final was an extreme shock to the system.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
LOUIS VAN GAAL (SINCE JULY 2009)
A Dutch title with AZ Alkmaar was his first trophy in a decade. To prove he is back for good, the man who led Ajax to the Champions League in 1995 must now deliver at Bayern.

THE PLAYER
ANATOLIY TYMOSHCHUK
If captain Mark Van Bommel is the holding midfielder, the Ukrainian may play on the right.

VAN GAAL TO ERADICATE MISTAKES

In this system the watchwords are possession, discipline, relentlessly rehearsed attacking movement, the avoidance of technical errors and player versatility. Used almost exclusively on the left side of midfield in his first two years at Bayern, Ribery could be switched to the point of a midfield diamond.

BESIKTAS (TUR)

Aiming high

The Black Eagles believe their domestic double will be the launch pad for further success

Aerial threat...Bobo

WINNING the Turkish league and cup double last season has raised expectations that Besiktas and coach Mustafa Denizli can make significant progress in the Champions League. However, it is not so long since their darkest hour in the competition, when the Black Eagles conceded eight goals to Liverpool.

Denizli had wanted to strengthen the squad over the summer, but the financial problems restricted new arrivals to Italy defender Matteo Ferrari from Genoa and German midfielder Michael Fink from Eintracht Frankfurt. Given their debts, qualifying for the Champions League group stages was a huge boost and reaching the knockout stage would be an extra bonus for the Black and Whites.

But there are still some questions over unsettled players. Brazilian forward Bobo had offers from Greece but could not agree terms on a move, while the club are hoping to offload injury prone Matias Delgado and bring in Stuttgart's Yildiray Basturk.

Besiktas's biggest strengths are their home support in Istanbul and the tactical experience of coach Denizli. With a good draw, they have a good chance of surviving the winter.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
MUSTAFA DENIZLI (SINCE NOVEMBER 2008)

Steered Besiktas to a Turkish league and cup double last season and is without question the most experienced coach in the country.

THE PLAYER
NIHAT KAHVECI
One of the stars of Euro 2008 who returned to Turkey this summer after seven seasons in Spain. Possesses excellent ball skills, good timing and a great shot.

SUPPLY LINE FROM THE FLANKS

Besiktas normally use a 4-4-2 system, with wide men Ibrahim Toraman and Yusuf Simsek supplying Mert Nobre or Bobo, who are excellent in the air. An alternative is a lone striker, with Nihat deeper or on the wings. Fabian Ernst and Fink like to shoot from distance while goalkeeper Rustu is highly experienced.

BORDEAUX (FRA)

Pressure point

Huge expectations back in France could prove too much for Laurent Blanc's inexperienced campaigners

In the mood...Cavenaghi

THE pressure is really on for the French champions this campaign. Laurent Blanc's side may have taken the Ligue 1 title in style last time out, but they achieved their success with no real European distraction after going out at the Champions League group stage and then suffering a quick exit in the UEFA Cup round of 32 against Galatasaray.

To be fair they did also win the French League Cup, so Blanc has already proved he can fight on two fronts. However, the Champions League is a different kettle of fish altogether and Bordeaux have been worryingly quiet in the transfer market this summer, despite the loss of hugely influential Senegal defender Souleymane Diawara to rivals Marseille.

After last term's triumphs there will be huge expectations in France. Bordeaux finished their last league campaign with a marvellous run of 11 victories so they will be confident of picking up where they left off – and their fans probably even more so. But the Champions League is a very demanding environment and Blanc's Bordeaux look to be at too early a stage in their evolution to pose any kind of serious threat in this season's competition.

If the draw is kind to them then it's not beyond the realms of possibility that they could progress past the group stage, but if they do it will be seen as a major triumph for *les Girondins*.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
LAURENT BLANC (SINCE JUNE 2007)
Has magnificently overachieved since taking his first coaching job. Having made his point in France, he'll now want to make a splash on the European stage.

THE PLAYER
YOANN GOURCUFF
Established himself in the national team last season, but he will be desperate to show Europe what he can do in club colours.

SOLID AND SECURE AT THE BACK

Blanc bases his side around a solid spine, with new keeper Cedric Carrasso one of Ligue 1's best; Alou Diarra, an excellent holding midfielder; Gourcuff, a potentially world-class creative player; and Fernando Cavenaghi, a top striker when the mood takes. Lacks an inspirational figure in central defence, but the back four is still a good unit.

CELTIC (SCO)

Style over substance

Playing attractive football might not be enough to win a place in the group stage

Promising...Fortune

WHILE they may still bask in the glory of their momentous 1967 European Cup win and have enjoyed several other exciting campaigns overseas, most recently when they reached the 2003 UEFA Cup Final, Celtic's Champions League record is something of a curate's egg.

Virtually indomitable at home in recent years – they have lost just two of their last 36 European games at Parkhead before the visit of Arsenal – their away record has been atrocious. In fact, their 2-0 victory over Dynamo Moscow in August ended a run of 23 defeats on the road.

The Parkhead factor has previously been enough to carry them through the group stages, though it might not be enough this time. New manager Tony Mowbray is an ardent disciple of the Arsene Wenger philosophy and, like the Gunners, Celtic's greatest virtues appear to be in the attacking third, with two nippy widemen and a little-and-large forward duo of Scott McDonald and Marc-Antoine Fortune that shows promise.

There are, however, question marks at the other end. Goalkeeper Artur Boruc can be either brilliant or a complete basket case. And if the Pole has an off day, Arsenal's attackers will have had a field day, especially as Celtic's back four struggle to cope with the pace and the mobility of top-class European attacking play.

THE MAIN MEN

THE MANAGER
TONY MOWBRAY (SINCE JULY 2009)

Mowbray has won admirers for his attractive football, but the defeat of Dynamo Moscow suggests he has added pragmatism without sacrificing the flair.

THE PLAYER
SCOTT BROWN
The midfielder remains a work in progress, but his combativeness and composure are reminiscent of the young Roy Keane.

MORE OF THE SAME FROM MOWBRAY

Not surprisingly for a side that is managed by Mowbray, the accent is on attractive, attacking football. Under the new regime, there is more width to Celtic's game, with both Shaun Maloney and Aiden McGeady deployed on the flanks, providing ammo for the front two of McDonald and Fortune.

CHELSEA (ENG)

Time to cash in

They may not have spent as much as some of their rivals, but Chelsea have bought in a coach with European pedigree

Staying put...Terry

IN the six years that Roman Abramovich has been pumping money into Chelsea, the club have only failed to reached the last four of the Champions League on one occasion: in 2006, when eventual winners Barcelona beat them in the first knockout round.

Defeat on penalties to Manchester United in the Final in Moscow a year ago was the closest Abramovich has come to winning Europe's top prize, but the Russian billionaire owner has remained committed to Chelsea even though he has found his financial power eclipsed by Manchester City and Real Madrid.

Abramovich has turned to Carlo Ancelotti to make the final breakthrough. The Italian reached the Champions League Final three times in eight seasons with Milan and he is a coach who is comfortable dealing with big-name, large-ego players.

While it may appear to be all change at Stamford Bridge with the arrival of Ancelotti, much has remained the same. Captain John Terry ended his summer stand-off by spurning Man City's advances and agreeing a new contract, while striker Didier Drogba also signed a new deal.

There were some new faces – Russia's Yuri Zhirkov and young striker Daniel Sturridge – but fans are holding out for a star name to give them hope that the Blues will finally take that last step to European success.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
CARLO ANCELOTTI (SINCE JULY 2009)
Generally seen as a "good bloke" during his time at Milan where he won trophies and managed the egos of numerous stars, as well as owner Silvio Berlusconi.

THE PLAYER
FRANK LAMPARD

The England midfielder's goals have proved Chelsea's salvation on numerous occasions in Europe and he'll be a threat again this campaign.

BLUES LOOK TO MAKE MOST OF DIAMOND

Ancelotti has dispensed with the 4-3-3 formation introduced by former manager Jose Mourinho in favour of a 4-4-2 line-up that uses a midfield diamond. However, Luiz Felipe Scolari also tried a similar approach with the Blues last season and the system was quickly found to be lacking enough width.

FC COPENHAGEN (DEN)

On the right path

As the biggest and richest club in the country, the Danish champions hope to set new standards

Tricky...Ailton

THE Danish champions remain confident that they can improve on their best-ever showing in the Champions League of three years ago when they managed to reach the group stage.

FC Copenhagen now dwarf all their domestic rivals in terms of financial resources and have the added bonus of playing their home matches at the national Parken Stadium, where a full house of 34,000 creates a significantly beneficial atmosphere. They even beat Manchester United there back in 2006.

Head coach Stale Solbakken has built a team with consistent purpose in the past three years, and the ambition now is to reach and then progress beyond the Champions League group stages for the first time.

However, that may well require a kind draw, as well as the side playing to its maximum potential this year.

The improving standard of the Danish Superliga also encourages optimism. Last season, AaB Aalborg were the first club from Denmark to finish third in a Champions League group, and there is no doubt that FC Copenhagen are a far superior team and squad this season. With strikers such as the lively Denmark international Morten Nordstrand often only able to make the bench, the signs are looking good.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
STALE SOLKBAKKEN (SINCE 2006)

The Norwegian survived a heart attack in training while a player at FC Copenhagen back in 2001 after being pronounced clinically dead at one stage.

THE PLAYER
JESPER GRONKJAER
Veteran flying winger who has recovered the form that once brought him spells at Ajax and Chelsea, where he played in a Champions League semi-final.

OFFERING WHATEVER IT TAKES

Able to be entertaining when the mood suits, or grind out the sort of gritty 0-0 away to Stabaek of Norway that ensured they are still in the Champions League. The Brazilian duo of Ailton and Cesar Santin are tricky customers, while Canada midfielder Atiba Hutchinson has valuable European experience.

CSKA MOSCOW (RUS)

Evgeny expects

CSKA president Evgeny Giner has replaced legendary coach Valeriy Gazzaev with Zico ... and demands results

Not the new Zhirkov...Dzagoev

WITH three league titles and five national cups in the past 10 years – not forgetting the UEFA Cup in 2005 – CSKA are Russia's most successful club of the past decade.

That success has been closely linked with the name of coach Valeriy Gazzaev and a group of talented Brazilian players. However, two years without a championship victory – CSKA finished third in 2007 and second in 2008 – proved too much to bear. It cost Gazzaev his job and he was replaced by Zico. The Brazilian legend made an impressive start in Moscow, winning the 2009 Russian Cup and Super Cup, but has been criticised of late by CSKA fans for relying too heavily on players from his homeland.

Club president Evgeny Giner is a close friend of Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich and CSKA's plentiful financial resources were boosted to the tune of £18million when Yuri Zhirkov joined the London side in the summer.

With their new stadium under construction, CSKA will use the Luzhniki Olympic arena as their home ground. This was the venue for the 2008 Champions League Final, when its artificial surface was temporarily replaced by grass.

Once patronised by the Soviet Union's ministry of defence, CSKA (Central Sports Club of the Army) recently signed a major sponsorship deal with Aeroflot Russian airlines.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ZICO (SINCE JANUARY 2009)
The 1983 World Player of the Year joined CSKA from Uzbekistan club Bunyodkor and has also coached in Japan and Turkey.

THE PLAYER
IGOR AKINFEEV

Has been CSKA's first choice goalkeeper for the past six years, despite being only 23 years old. He won his first cap against Norway in April 2004 at the age of 18 to become Russia's youngest-ever international.

CARVALHO'S RETURN COULD BE KEY

After the departure of Zhirkov to Chelsea, Zico has used Alan Dzagoev on the left wing with limited success. Brazil's Daniel Carvalho, who was voted the Russian league's best player in 2005, may be used as the playmaker if he recovers from injury and loses enough weight to regain his top form.

DEBRECEN (HUN)

Local heroes

The Hungarian champions' policy of recruiting players from the local region is paying big dividends on the pitch

Steady progress...Debrecen

CLUB owner and former restaurateur Gabor Szima has overseen a wise financial and transfer policy that has turned Debrecen into Hungary's most successful side this century, and the most powerful team ever to have emerged from the provinces.

Loki have won the league four times in the past five season as Szima has given his coaches free rein to do their job. Added to this, a kernel of loyal, motivated players – of whom the likes of winger Tibor Dombi, defender Csaba Bernath, and midfielder and captain Zoltan Kiss were all born in the area – ensure that there is a superb team spirit.

A case in point is 21-year-old Jozsef Varga, who was born locally and came up through the youth team to score vital goals in both legs against Kalmar of Sweden in Debrecen's first Champions League qualifier, before an easier task against Estonia's Levadia.

Current coach Andras Herczeg and sports director Csaba Bartha form part of a backroom infrastructure that is the envy of all in Hungary. All that is missing is a stadium.

While the 9,640-capacity Olah Gabor is fine for league games it is well below UEFA standards, so the club are having to stage their Europa League games at Budapest's Ferenc Puskas Stadium.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ANDRAS HERCZEG (SINCE 2007)
Has been involved with the club for 40 years. Was assistant to title-winning Attila Supka before replacing Miroslav Beranek.

THE PLAYER
GERGELY RUDOLF

A regular in Erwin Koeman's national side, he learned much of his trade in France with Nancy, where he was a leading scorer for their junior team.

DOMBI'S LATE ARRIVAL CAN CHANGE GAMES

Debrecen usually play 4-4-2, with Rudolf playing slightly ahead as the front man. Kiss is the midfield engine, while Leandro links defence with midfield. The veteran Dombi can also be relied upon to provide width and speed later on in the game, often popping up from the substitutes' bench to notch vital goals.

DYNAMO KYIV (UKR)

Potential winners?

New coach Valeriy Gazzaev has swept into the Ukrainian club promising European success "within three years"

Trophy hunters...Kyiv

THE sudden departure of Yuri Semin to Lokomotiv Moscow at the end of last season drastically changed the atmosphere in the camp of the Ukraine champions as another Russian coach, Valeriy Gazzaev, came in and promised he would win the Champions League within the next three years.

In contrast to Semin, who thanks to his paternal approach steered the team into the UEFA Cup semi-finals last term, Gazzaev is well known for his autocratic methods of working with his players. "I do not need to be loved by the footballers," he says. "Let them adore their parents, their girlfriends and children. As for me, they have to obey my orders."

To confirm his intentions, Gazzaev first reduced his players' holidays by two weeks and then insisted on a heavy training schedule in Austria that brought back memories of the days of the legendary Valery Lobanovsky.

There is no room for any kind of interference in his training programme either, and he banned former Lobanovsky comrade-in-arms Oleh Bazylevych – head of the club's scientific centre – from entering Dynamo facilities when training was taking place.

Brazilian defender Leandro Almeida, from Atletico Mineiro Gerais, has been Gazzaev's only signing so far, while the prolific Guinea striker Ismael Bangoura has been sold to Rennes.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
VALERIY GAZZAEV (SINCE MAY 2009)
The only coach to have guided two clubs (Spartak-Alania Vladikavkaz and CSKA Moscow) to the Russian title. Named coach of the year by UEFA in 2005 after leading CSKA to UEFA Cup victory.

THE PLAYER
ARTEM MILEVSKIY
Belarus-born, he joined Dynamo at 15 and is now a Ukraine international. Was the country's player of the season last term.

ALL CHANGE FOR KYIV

Gazzaev has completely changed Semin's defensive 4-5-1 into a far more attacking formation by using Andriy Yarmolenko and Oleh Husyev as wide men and trying to utilise the whole width of the pitch to launch assaults on the opposition. Milos Ninkovic will play just behind the main striker Milevskiy.

FIORENTINA (ITA)

Luck of the draw

After a tough draw in last year's competition, the Italians hope that fate deals them a kinder hand this time around

Prospect...Marchionni

THEY may have edged out the likes of Roma, Genoa and Lazio as Serie A's fourth best side, but the *Viola* have struggled to emulate their wealthier rivals in European competition. Last season they were handed a tough group-stage draw with Bayern Munich, Lyon and Steaua Bucharest, and dropped into the UEFA Cup, where they lost to Ajax.

And changes to the qualifying format mean Cesare Prandelli's side were dealt a potentially difficult draw against Sporting Lisbon, so this campaign could prove just as frustrating.

The club might now be stable financially after suffering bankruptcy in 2002 and the calciopoli scandal in 2006, but Prandelli still has to work with a limited squad compared to Serie A's big three of Milan, Internazionale and Juventus.

He has gambled on out-of-favour players such as Adrian Mutu and Alberto Gilardino in the past and been repaid with goals, but he has lost influential midfielder Felipe Melo – who is now a fixture in the Brazil side – to Juventus. Marco Marchionni, who arrived in the opposite direction from the *Bianconeri*, could flourish if given the chances he was denied in Turin.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
CESARE PRANDELLI (SINCE JULY 2005)
One of Italy's longest serving coaches, he has transformed Fiorentina's fortunes but is often linked to Juventus, where he spent six seasons as a player.

THE PLAYER
ADRIAN MUTU
Despite his much publicised off-the-pitch problems, the Romania forward has revived his career in Florence.

MUTU AND GILARDINO PROVIDE THE THREAT

Mutu is the key figure in a 4-2-3-1 formation, playing just behind lone striker Gilardino. Fiorentina are too reliant on Gilardino's goals, but they have experience on the bench in the form of midfielder Cristiano Zanetti, signed from Juventus, plus promising youngster Stevan Jovetic and the right winger Franco Semioli.

INTERNAZIONALE (ITA)

Winning is all

Second place is nowhere for Jose Mourinho's team this season. Success depends on Champions League glory

Into Inter...Milito

THE Champions League is Inter's mission this season – nothing else will suffice – so it is significant that Jose Mourinho has claimed that the current Inter team is only "40 per cent" his, leading some cynics to suggest that he was getting his excuses in early, should his side fail to land their holy grail.

Perhaps Mourinho protests a tad too much. There were major changes this summer at Inter and they clearly had Mourinho's stamp on them. Zlatan Ibrahimovic, such a crucial figure in the club's Serie A victories over the past three years, has taken his mercurial attacking talent to Barcelona, with Samuel Eto'o arriving in his place. Luis Jimenez (West Ham on loan), Hernan Crespo (Genoa) and Julio Cruz (Lazio) were all offloaded, while midfield powerhouse Patrick Vieira has been in talks with a number of English and French clubs, and Luis Figo retired at the end of last season.

Equally significant for Inter was the signing of prolific Argentina striker Diego Milito from Genoa, while Brazil's Lucio, from Bayern Munich, will add authority to the back line.

Defender Javier Zanetti says it's the best Inter team he has played in. There is certainly strength-in-depth – with no space in the starting line-up for outstanding Colombia defender Ivan Cordoba – but Mourinho could still do with adding a little more creativity to the midfield.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
JOSE MOURINHO (SINCE JULY 2007)
Having won league titles in Portugal, England and Italy, he must now win the Champions League for the second time – having succeeded with Porto in 2004 – to keep Inter happy.

THE PLAYER
SAMUEL ETO'O
The Cameroon striker, twice a Champions League winner with Barcelona, gives Inter a new cutting edge in attack.

TOUGH, EFFICIENT, BUT LACKING SPARK

Inter will be a hard side to break down, with Lucio reinforcing an already mean defence. How quickly Milito strikes up an understanding with Eto'o will be crucial as Inter look a little short on creativity – hence their reported interest in Chelsea's Deco and Real Madrid's surplus-to-requirements Wesley Sneijder.

JUVENTUS (ITA)

Further progress

The Old Lady's rehabilitation goes on, with several new faces offering hope of a solid European campaign

Spice boy...Diego

AFTER an effective summer recruitment campaign which strengthened the spine of the team, Juventus will be confident of reasonable progress in this season's Champions League.

The new arrivals all bring an extra something to the party and mean that the departures of Olof Mellberg, to Olympiakos, and Marco Marchionni, to Fiorentina, as well as the retirement of Czech international Pavel Nedved – will not be so greatly noticed.

Brazilian duo Diego, from Werder Bremen, and Felipe Melo, from Fiorentina, bring creativity and authority respectively to midfield, while the returning Fabio Cannavaro, from Real Madrid, adds vital experience to defence.

Off the pitch, former club captain Ciro Ferrara has emerged from the backroom to succeed Claudio Ranieri as coach. His appointment was welcomed by national boss Marcello Lippi, who tipped his former charge to lead Juve to success this season.

A possible weakness is a lack of options in attack, where Alessandro Del Piero is not getting any younger and David Trezeguet has been tipped to move on.

Juventus will continue to play home matches at Torino's Stadio Olimpico while the Stadio delle Alpi is refurbished but, overall, they look well placed to continue their recovery from the calciopoli scandal of 2006.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
CIRO FERRARA (SINCE JULY 2009)

A coaching rookie, but widely admired in Italy as a sharp operator. Performed an effective backroom role as assistant to Ranieri and now finds himself promoted to the top job.

THE PLAYER
DIEGO
The Brazilian was outstanding for Werder Bremen last season and is now expected to add spice to Juventus' attack.

NEW ARRIVAL TO GIVE JUVE EXTRA DIMENSION

Diego adds a new dimension to the Juventus attack, where Del Piero and Amauri are first-choice strikers in an old fashioned little-and-large partnership. Mauro Camoranesi gives Juve an attacking outlet down the right, while Sebastian Giovinco is an outstanding creative midfield option on the bench.

LEVSKI SOFIA (BUL)

Small steps

Despite the late arrival of a new coach, the Bulgarians have avoided the pitfalls of recent Champions League sojourns

Baku to the future...Levski

AFTER humiliating defeats in the last two seasons' qualifying rounds – to Finland's Tampere in 2007 and Belarus' BATE Borisov in 2008 – victories this year over Sant Julia of Andorra and Baku of Azerbaijan have handed Levski another chance to reach the group stage of the competition. To do so would repeat their success of 2006, when they became the first team from Bulgaria to go that far in the Champions League.

Realistically, though, the current side are not yet ready for such a challenge. The strange sacking of title-winning coach Emil Velev has inevitably impacted on the players he led to success.

New boss Ratko Dostanic has not yet been able to impose his own style on the team and they only survived against Baku thanks to the performances of individuals and a large dose of luck.

However, dropping down into the Europa League would be far from disastrous, especially as the financial rewards on offer – though considerably less than the Champions League – would still benefit Levski.

Last season, some fans turned against coach Velev despite that league title success. Now, after victory over Baku in a game described as the "match of the year" by the Bulgarian press, things are looking up for Levski.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
RATKO DOSTANIC (SINCE JULY 2009)
The Serb replaced title-winning coach Emil Velev just five days before the Champions League qualifier against Baku.

THE PLAYER
DARKO TASEVSKI

The Macedonia midfielder provided the assists for the goals that saw off Baku in the third qualifying round and will be looking to add to his tally as the campaign progresses.

KEY INDIVIDUALS GUIDE THE STYLE

Levski base their game around certain key individuals: keeper Georgi Petkov, midfielders Cedric Bardon and Tasevski, and forwards Ze Soares and Georgi Hristov. Hristo Yovov, Ze Soares and Hristov often change places during the game. Levski can also switch to 4-4-2, with Yovov dropping back into midfield, if required.

LIVERPOOL (ENG)

Rafa's priorities

Financial concerns and a desire to snatch the league from Manchester United may overshadow European ambitions

Dynamic duo...Torres and Gerrard

A FIRST English league title for 19 years would be welcomed ahead of European success by most Liverpool fans, who continue to place their trust in manager Rafa Benitez in the face of ongoing uncertainty off the pitch at Anfield.

The global financial crisis has badly hit the club's American owners, George Gillett and Tom Hicks, and they have struggled to re-finance the debt used to buy the club two years ago. Added to this, the proposed new stadium in nearby Stanley Park, a central plank of their takeover plan, has been placed on the back burner.

Meanwhile, Benitez has taken control of transfer policy following the departure earlier this year of chief executive Rick Parry. But the deals so far – Xabi Alonso's £30million sale to Real Madrid and the £17m purchase of Glen Johnson from Portsmouth – do not provide encouragement that Liverpool will be an improved team on last season. Alberto Aquilani is a promising, if injury-prone, replacement for Alonso, whose midfield scheming was crucial, while Johnson is highly effective going forward but his defensive contributions have been questioned.

Once again, Liverpool remain hugely dependent on their inspirational captain Steven Gerrard and the Spain striker Fernando Torres. Injury to either would diminish chances of success at home and abroad.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
RAFAEL BENITEZ (SINCE JULY 2004)

The Spaniard is facing a difficult year. Relations are still strained with the club's owners and he will face more direct criticism if his transfer dealings fail to deliver.

THE PLAYER
STEVEN GERRARD
Liverpool's captain is a talisman for the team. His goals and midfield dynamism, as well as that partnership with Torres, will again be crucial in Europe.

REDS' TRIED AND TESTED APPROACH

Gerrard and Torres remain the central figures in a formation where the main changes are Johnson in at right-back and Aquilani replacing Alonso as the midfield schemer. Central defensive options are limited following a back injury to Daniel Agger and Sami Hyypia's departure during the summer.

LYON (FRA)

Target men

Quarter-finals are the minimum requirement but Puel first has to re-instil the winning habit at Gerland

Experience...Cissokho

FINISHING third in Ligue 1, and a whopping nine points behind champions Bordeaux, was not what the doctor ordered for former Lille boss Claude Puel's first season in charge at Stade Gerland. And anything less than domestic league success this term could see him out on his ear.

Lyon also slipped down the pecking order in Europe, qualifying for the knockout stage of last year's Champions League in unconvincing fashion before they were eliminated and given a footballing lesson by eventual winners Barcelona.

Since then they've lost their two best operators – Karim Benzema (to Real Madrid) and Juninho (Al Gharafa, Qatar) – but they have recruited Aly Cissokho and Lisandro Lopez, two players from Portuguese side Porto who have previous experience of the Champions League, and Bafetimbi Gomis from Saint-Etienne.

Puel has to do two things this season: first, he has to get Lyon back into the habit of winning; and second, he needs to turn a side that was no fun to watch last season into an entertaining outfit to satisfy disgruntled fans. But he isn't a naturally extravagant man and creating a team who are not in his own image won't be easy.

Lyon will need to make the quarter-finals at least if they are to consider their European campaign a success, but that could be far from easy.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
CLAUDE PUEL (SINCE JUNE 2008)
After a difficult first year the 47-year-old knows he needs to deliver this season. His "my way or the highway" approach didn't please everyone at Lyon, but the players now know the drill.

THE PLAYER
LISANDRO LOPEZ
The Argentina striker has big shoes to fill in replacing Benzema, but he's experienced and adds a physical presence.

THREAT FROM THE FLANKS

Puel believes in collective responsibility, hard work and pressing, and after a season in charge – together with the new recruits he's brought in – he'll finally be able to put out his own team playing to his system. Look for more of a threat from the flanks from Sidney Govou and new signing Michel Bastos from Lille.

MACCABI HAIFA (ISR)

Home advantage

Past conquerors of Olympiakos and Manchester United, underestimate the Israeli champions at your peril

Promise...Ghadir

OPPONENTS of the current Israeli Premier League champions would be well advised not to write them off at any point. The Greens are not known for throwing in the towel – and they proved as much in the third qualifying round, coming back from three down to beat Aktobe of Kazakhstan 4-3.

Maccabi are no strangers to the Champions League. In 2002 they became the first club from their country to make the group stage of the competition. Although they did not progress any further, they produced some excellent results at home, notably victories over Olympiakos and Manchester United, and striker Yaniv Katan from that side is still around today.

Generally happy with the squad that won the club's sixth league title of this millennium – and mindful that they have an annual operating budget of just £5.3million – the club did not invest heavily this summer, signing Portuguese centre-back Jorge Teixeira from Cypriot club Paphos and Skonto Riga's Georgia striker Vladimir Dvalishvili, who scored twice on his debut for the club in the second qualifying round against Glentoran.

Maccabi have promising strikers in teenager Mohammad Ghadir and Nigerian prospect Yero – back after loan spells with Hapoel Nazareth Illit and Ironi Kiryat Shmona – though central defender Leo Krupnik will be missed after his move to New York Red Bulls.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ELISHA LEVY (SINCE JUNE 2008)
Maccabi's captain in the early 1980s, he had to wait until his 50th birthday to finally get the opportunity to lead a top Israeli side, lured away from Bnei Sakhnin to replace Ronny Levy.

THE PLAYER
YANIV KATAN

Versatile national team attacker who may not have made the grade at West Ham, but has served Maccabi admirably in two spells over a decade.

SAFETY FIRST WHEN NECESSARY

When they fancy their chances Maccabi are likely to employ an attack-minded 4-4-2. However, when up against it a 4-2-3-1 might be necessary, with John Culma and Biran Kayal as the holding midfielders, Katan and young guns Lior Rafaelov and Eyal Golasa as the creators and Dvalishvili as the lone front runner.

MANCHESTER UNITED (ENG)

Eyes on the prize

Despite the departure of Cristiano Ronaldo to Real Madrid, United will be confident of a Final return

Big-match mentality...Owen

ANOTHER season, another European campaign that United manager Alex Ferguson will believe can end in European glory. The Glazer family may keep much of the £80million from the sale of Cristiano Ronaldo to service the club's debt, but Ferguson still has a squad capable of reaching another European Final.

Ferguson has mastered the modern art of squad rotation to such an extent that it is hard to pick a typical starting XI. Old hands such as Ryan Giggs and Paul Scholes will be in and out of the side on a regular basis, as will youngsters such as the Da Silva twins from Brazil and Italian striker Federico Macheda.

The likes of Park Ji-sung, Anderson and Darren Fletcher provide extra midfield options, while young England keeper Ben Foster is patiently waiting for his chance and midfielder Owen Hargreaves is busy plotting a return from serious injury.

The most intriguing storyline of the season could well be Michael Owen, who was signed on a risk-free Bosman from relegated Newcastle. A big-name supersub with a big-match mentality could be just the tonic to launch the post-Ronaldo era.

The ultimate irony for Ferguson and United fans would be to triumph in the Champions League Final next May at Ronaldo's new home, the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ALEX FERGUSON
(SINCE NOVEMBER 1986)
The Scot shows no signs of hanging up the hairdryer just yet, with new battles against moneyed rivals Manchester City and Real Madrid to maintain his interest.

THE PLAYER
WAYNE ROONEY

A big season with the World Cup looming on the horizon. The departure of Ronaldo places a big responsibility on Rooney as a central striker.

BERBATOV AND ROONEY IN THE CENTRE

Without Ronaldo and Carlos Tevez, United will be less flamboyant but they will be harder to beat. Rooney and Dimitar Berbatov are set for a more central role as United switch to a 4-4-2, but if Owen finds his scoring touch they could go to a 4-3-1-2 to accommodate him, with Rooney dropping deeper.

MARSEILLE (FRA)

Summer of change

Dider Deschamps needs his new-look side to gel after all the upheaval at the Velodrome

Attacking mix...Niang

IT IS almost impossible to predict what Marseille will do in Europe, given the upheaval the club have gone through in the close season: coach Eric Gerets left, president Pape Diouf was given his marching orders, and then owner Robert Louis-Dreyfus passed away, leaving l'OM in a state of flux through a large part of the summer.

Favourite son Didier Deschamps is back as coach though, and he has been busy, bringing in former PSG midfielder Edouard Cisse from Besiktas in Turkey and Argentina midfielder Lucho Gonzalez from Porto, plus defender Souleymane Diawara (Bordeaux), Cameroon midfielder Stephane M'Bia (Rennes), Argentina defender Gabriel Heinze (Real Madrid) and striker Fernando Morientes (Valencia).

One thing is certain, though: the team that competes in Europe will be noticeably different to the one that finished second in Ligue 1 last season, with key players such as skipper Lorik Cana (Sunderland), Karim Ziani (Wolfsburg) and Ronald Zubar (Wolves) among those to have left. At least the attack looks stable, with Mamadou Niang, Brandao and Bakari Kone all still in the mix.

It will take time for this new side to gel, so will the Champions League come too soon for l'OM? Or does Deschamps' vast experience of high-level European football mean Marseille will hit the ground running?

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
DIDIER DESCHAMPS
(SINCE JULY 2009)
In charge of the club he once played for, he already has a European managerial pedigree, having led Monaco to the Champions League Final in 2004.

THE PLAYER
BRANDAO

Big, strong, willing Brazilian striker with a nose for goal. His physical presence will be vital if Marseille are to make any impression in Europe.

FAST FORWARD, QUICKER AT THE BACK

Marseille's obsessive support demands that their team attacks and Deschamps should have the players at his disposal to keep the fans happy. However, he's toughened up his defence and made it more mobile too, as he believed last year's side was too static. Expect the excitement to come from Lucho Gonzalez.

MILAN (ITA)

New broom

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Some big names have moved on, but Milan still aim high

Pure Klaas...Huntelaar

IS there life after Carlo Ancelotti, Paolo Maldini and Kaka? It has been all change at Milan this summer, with the departures of the club's long-serving coach, longest-serving player and outstanding attacking force.

Club owner and Italian prime minister Silvio Berlusconi came under bitter fire from fans after the £57million sale of Kaka to Real Madrid and he was quick to promise cash for transfers. Holland striker Klaas-Jan Huntelaar, a victim of the Dutch cull at Real Madrid, was the major arrival and he joins USA defender Oguchi Onyewu, who impressed at the Confederations Cup and was signed from Standard Liege, and Brazil defender Thiago Silva, who joins from Fluminense.

Milan also resisted attempts by their former manager to take midfielder Andrea Pirlo to Chelsea, but perhaps the biggest change took place off the pitch, where rookie coach Leonardo has replaced Ancelotti.

The early signs are that the Brazilian will introduce a more attacking element to Milan's tactical outlook, with Ronaldinho set to emerge as a key figure in a more central role.

With David Beckham welcome back at Milanello at any stage in the new year, Milan always have ambitions to do well in the Champions League and will be confident of progressing to the knockout stage.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
LEONARDO (SINCE JULY 2009)
Milan have taken a gamble on their former player, a 1994 World Cup winner. The *Rossoneri* were impressed by his role in bringing Kaka and Pato to Milan.

THE PLAYER
RONALDINHO
It's make-or break time for the 29-year-old after his peripheral role last term. With a World Cup place at stake, he has the chance to replace Kaka at San Siro.

FAMILIAR...BUT DIFFERENT

There's a familiar look to Milan's midfield, where Pirlo still pulls the strings. However there are changes in attack, with a central role for Ronaldinho behind the new partnership of Alexandre Pato and Huntelaar. In defence, new boy Thiago Silva arrives, possibly to partner Onyewu ahead of injury-prone Alessandro Nesta.

OLYMPIAKOS (GRE)

Change of focus

The all-conquering Greek champions feel now is the time to prove their worth on the European stage

"Must do better"...Mellberg

WITH nothing to prove domestically after clinching a fifth successive league title, this season the Greek champions have set their sights on European glory in the Champions League.

The team are in good physical condition, the players mark all over the pitch and they have gained a much more positive attitude since the arrival of new coach Temuri Ketsbaia.

An extended run in the group stage of the Champions League will also help the team's coffers, as Olympiakos are reportedly running at a loss of at least £60million, due mostly to hefty wages for players and coaches of the past.

"If Olympiakos do not make it to the group stages of the Champions League it will be a catastrophe," said the team's Polish defender Michal Zewlakow. "Last season we made the mistake of thinking we would easily qualify for the group stages, but we didn't."

A newcomer this season, Sweden defender Olof Mellberg – who spent last season with Juventus after moving to Serie A from Aston Villa – is in agreement with his new team-mate.

"I know that Olympiakos have won the domestic league title for many years, but we must do well in Europe," says Mellberg. "We must continue to work hard to win the league championship and to make one step further in Europe."

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
TEMURI KETSBAIA (SINCE MAY 2009)
Georgia-born coach who led Cypriot club Anorthosis Famagusta to the group stage of the Champions League last season – a run which included knocking out Olympiakos.

THE PLAYER
ANTONIOS NIKOPOLIDIS
Team captain who, at the age of 38, is probably playing his last season after retiring from the national team.

KETSBAIA SETS OUT A SIDE FOR EUROPE

Midfielder Ieroklis Stoltidis and English striker Matt Derbyshire have been missing from the starting line-up with injuries, but Luciano Galletti and Jaouad Zairi have been outstanding in controlling the midfield, with Konstantinos Mitroglou taking away a starting position from Diogo who comes in as a substitute.

PANATHINAIKOS (GRE)

Domestic priority

The Greens' long-suffering supporters want to see an end to Olympiakos' repetitive reign on home soil

Competitive...Silva

AFTER spending several years concentrating on Europe, a summer of hefty investment in the transfer market sees Pana making the Greek league – and breaking the monopoly of Olympiakos – their priority this term.

Panathinaikos, who finished third in the league last season and made it to the Champions League qualifying round by winning a post-season play-off, paid around £7million to buy France striker Djibril Cisse from Marseille, but their spree didn't end there.

Argentinian midfielder Sebastian Leto arrived from Liverpool, while national defender Kostas Katsouranis was signed from Benfica.

"Every day that goes by, and every practice session, is very important as each one of us gets to know each other better and to get better rhythm," says Katsouranis. "We are still not a complete team."

Experienced midfielder and captain Giorgos Karagounis also believes that, because the team has a number of new players to bed in, they will need a little more time to become familiar with playing together.

Meanwhile Brazil defensive midfielder Gilberto Silva adds: "For some the basic goal is to win the Greek championship, but in every match you must fight for the best result.

"The positive result will give you a boost for your next goal."

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
HENK TEN CATE (SINCE JUNE 2008)
The Dutch coach says that his goal this season is to win the Greek championship after a long drought and the recent dominance of Olympiakos.

THE PLAYER
DJIBRIL CISSE

The striker has promised the club's supporters that he will score many goals this season, but started slowly in pre-season and Champions League qualification matches.

KARAGOUNIS IS THE KEY

Once again Karagounis will be the "quarterback" of the team in midfield, where he will be supported by Gilberto Silva, while Cisse is expected to add plenty to the team's attacking play this campaign. New signing Leto also looked a good addition during the pre-season and Champions League qualification matches.

PORTO (POR)

More of the same

Domestic dominance and progress to the Champions League knockout stage have now become the norm

Rising high...Porto

HAVING won 14 of the last 20 domestic titles – not to mention the 2003 UEFA Cup and 2004 Champions League – Porto are Portugal's most successful club at home and abroad over the past two decades.

The key to much of their success has been their stability on and off the pitch, with the club reluctant to part with talented youngsters until the time is right for their transfers to yield a large financial return.

This summer, the four-time defending league champions lost three players to French clubs: Argentinian duo Lisandro Lopez (Lyon) and Lucho Gonzalez (Marseille), as well as left-back Aly Cissokho (Lyon). To soften the blow, Argentinian playmaker Fernando Belluschi arrived from Olympiakos and Colombia striker Radamel Falcao from River Plate.

The newcomers join a core of players who have enjoyed immense success in Portugal and have also made it to the knockout phase of the Champions League in five of the last six seasons. In the last campaign, the Dragons reached the quarter-finals, where they lost to eventual runners-up Manchester United.

Experienced manager Jesualdo Ferreira would love to win a European trophy for the first time in his career, but a more realistic goal for Porto this season is once again making the knockout stage of the competition.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
JESUALDO FERREIRA (SINCE AUGUST 2006)

The only Portuguese manager to win three league titles in a row, he has finally earned the respect he deserves. Not a master tactician but he inspires his players.

THE PLAYER
RAUL MEIRELES
With the departure of Lucho Gonzalez, the responsibility of setting Porto's tempo will fall on the shoulders of the midfielder.

FERREIRA KEEPS IT FLUID

Porto have perfected a versatile 4-3-3 formation and Ferreira will stick to it, replacing Lisandro with Falcao and Lucho Gonzalez with Belluschi. Defensively the Dragons are solid, while Meireles will be entrusted with the responsibility of getting wingers Cristian Rodriguez and Hulk involved.

RANGERS (SCO)

Normal service

The Scottish champions are back after a two-year break, but familiar failings looks set to produce a familiar result

Good, not great...Boyd

DOMESTIC dominance has been shared with Old Firm rivals Celtic from time immemorial, but European success remains elusive.

Rangers are back in the Champions League proper after a two-year hiatus and, having reached the UEFA Cup Final in 2008, the Scottish champions have shown they are no pushovers in Europe. However, getting beyond the group stage is likely to prove beyond them.

Strained finances continue to restrict their transfer activity and the 'Gers squad looks too thin and lacking in variety to prosper in the Champions League.

As always, they will be very well organised and hard for opponents to break down, but Walter Smith's side appear to lack a genuine cutting edge. Strikers such as Kris Boyd and Kenny Miller may find goals easy enough to come by in the Scottish Premier League, but they are probably a little too pedestrian at this level.

Rangers' one and only European triumph came in the 1972 Cup-winners Cup when they defeated Dynamo Moscow.

They qualified this year automatically as domestic champions – for which they will be grateful, having slipped up in the qualifiers last season against Lithuanian outfit Kaunas.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
WALTER SMITH (SINCE JANUARY 2007)
At the helm in the 1990s when Rangers completed their nine-a-row league titles. Now in his second spell, he has already taken the club to a UEFA Cup Final – in 2008.

THE PLAYER
PEDRO MENDES
A member of Porto's 2004 European champions, he's added a new dimension to the Scottish champions' midfield.

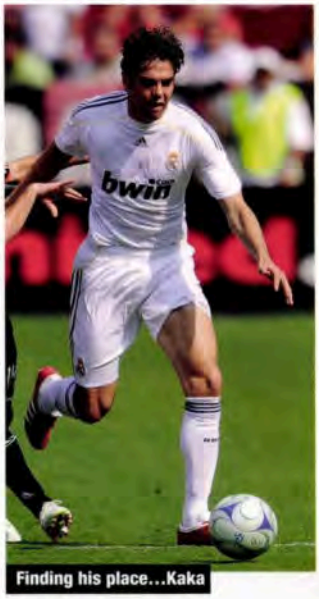
DAVIS AND MENDES THE FULCRUM

Rangers are at their strongest when everything goes through central midfield pair Pedro Mendes and Steven Davis, who have formed an impressive partnership while embracing the big work ethic that permeates Walter Smith's side. Both will look to get forward to bolster the attack wherever possible.

REAL MADRID (SPA)

Real deal at last?

After years of flattering to deceive, Madrid may have finally got the balance right to challenge once again in Europe



Finding his place...Kaka

HOLD on to your hats, it's going to be a bumpy ride. Florentino Perez is back at Real Madrid and so are the galacticos – more than £200million worth of them.

After the biggest spending spree in football history – on Cristiano Ronaldo, Kaka, Karim Benzema, Xabi Alonso, Raul Albiol and Alvaro Arbeloa, to name but six – Madrid are deadly serious about winning a record 10th European Cup. Especially as the 2010 Final will be at their own Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

Madrid's record since their last victory, in Glasgow in 2002, is poor. Semi-finalists in 2003 and quarter-finalists in 2004, they have gone out of the competition at the first knockout round for the past five seasons. In that time, they have also watched eternal rivals Barcelona win the trophy twice.

The burning question is whether latest coach Manuel Pellegrini can get all the new arrivals to gel together in time to challenge for honours. Alonso could be a key figure in linking all the play together, but Madrid's attempt to offload their Dutch contingent – Rafael Van der Vaart, Wesley Sneijder, Arjen Robben, Roysten Drenthe and Ruud Van Nistelrooy – could leave the squad short of options.

There are so many questions, but whatever happens Madrid will make for compulsive viewing.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
MANUEL PELLEGRINI (SINCE JULY 2009)
After five seasons with Villarreal, he is La Liga's longest-serving manager. The Chilean's signature cost the Madrid club £3.4million.

THE PLAYER
CRISTIANO RONALDO

Who else but the world's most expensive player? With a price tag of £80million, the boy from Madeira knows that he has to deliver.

ALONSO AND DIARRA BRING BALANCE

In contrast to previous galacticos teams, this Madrid side has more balance, with Lassana Diarra the anchor man in midfield and Alonso directing operations. Left midfield is the problem position, but Pellegrini has hinted that Kaka may not play in a central role, which could mean he is switched to the left.

RUBIN KAZAN (RUS)

Teamwork the key

They might be short on star quality, but Russia's table-toppers could pack a surprising punch

Quick and skilful...Dominguez

THE club from the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan are lavishly backed by the ambitious local government of Kazan and, having gained promotion to the Russian top flight in 2002, it took Rubin just six years to win their first league title.

Many critics felt that their 2008 championship was won as a result of other clubs and players being preoccupied with European club competitions and that year's Euro Championship, but Rubin have been quick to prove their doubters wrong and they were top of the pile once again by the halfway point this term.

Their 30,000-seater stadium, situated next to the beautiful Kazan Kremlin, has been renovated for the club's Champions League debut and, even though they lack much in the way of international experience and star names, Rubin's solid teamwork and counter-attacking style could prove effective during this campaign.

And to help their cause, Rubin have not given up hope of signing 6ft 7in Czech Republic striker Jan Koller from Krylia Sovetov before the transfer window closes.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
GURBAN BERDIYEW (SINCE 2001)
Ambitious manager who led Rubin from division two to the league title. Seemingly unemotional, he is regarded as one of Russia's leading coaches.

THE PLAYER
SERGEI SEMAK
Rubin's captain and Russia's skipper at Euro 2008. At 33 he is the team's backbone in midfield, but has also played centre-back and centre-forward.

BUILDING FROM A SOLID DEFENCE

Rubin will rely on a solid defence marshalled by the reliable Roman Sharonov and Cesar Navas. Striker Aleksandr Bukharov is supported by the fast and skilful Alejandro Dominguez and Turkey's Gokdeniz Karadeniz. Their attacking potential will be increased by the signing of highly rated Alan Kasaev from Kuban.

SALZBURG (AUT)

Aiming high

Owner Dietrich Mateschitz demands success on all fronts for Salzburg. But can new boss Huub Stevens deliver?

Out of Austria...Schiemer

ONCE again Salzburg's owner, the energy-drink tycoon Dietrich Mateschitz, has spent big in a bid to scale the heights in Europe. New coach Huub Stevens has the task of building a competitive team quickly – and he is expected to win the domestic league and cup, as well as reach the Champions League group stage.

Mateschitz turned to Stevens after previous coach Co Adriaanse – another Dutchman – failed to qualify for Europe's elite competition last year and he has brought five new internationals to the club: Dusan Svento (Slavia Prague), Franz Schiemer (Austria Wien), Thomas Augustinussen (Aalborg), Christian Schwegler (Young Boys) and Admir Vladavic (Zilina). In addition, Simon Cziommer, from AZ Alkmaar, was acquired to stabilise the midfield.

Salzburg ousted Bohemians of Ireland and Croatia's Dinamo Zagreb in the early qualifying round thanks to away wins – which underlines their ability to score on the road. In their domestic league, the defending champions have started reasonably well and are already established in the top three.

With a capacity of 16,200, the Red Bull Arena is rather small by Champions League standards, but the one big advantage for Salzburg is their artificial grass pitch, which has already made the likes of Valencia, Blackburn Rovers and Zurich suffer in recent years.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
HUUB STEVENS (SINCE JULY 2009)
Having won the UEFA Cup with Schalke in 1997, the Dutchman was hired to make Mateschitz's Champions League dream come true.

THE PLAYER
MARC JANKO
The goal-getter turned down an offer from Tottenham to reach Champions League heights with Salzburg but, so far, he has failed to recapture last season's scoring power.

EFFICIENCY OVER EXCITEMENT

Stevens prefers a 4-4-1-1 set-up, regardless of the fans' dislike for the perceived lack of spectacle. The coach's priority is always to keep a clean sheet and then rely on the goal threat of 6ft 6in target man Janko. Stevens' defensive style has already been successful, winning the 1997 UEFA Cup for Germany's Schalke.

SEVILLA (SPA)

Absolutely Fabiano

The Spaniards have managed to hang on to their prize asset, but can they regain their seat at the top table?

Turning the tide...Kanoute

SEVILLA are one of Spanish football's more traditionally stable clubs – a fact demonstrated by the renewal of coach Manolo Jimenez's contract after they finished third in La Liga.

Under Jimenez, Sevilla have not been the sparkling team that they were a few years ago when, with Juande Ramos as boss and Dani Alves powering down the right wing, they won two successive UEFA Cups.

Last season they experienced a disappointing European campaign, failing to progress from the UEFA Cup group stage. But Jimenez secured a year-long stay of execution by squeezing into the Champions League.

Ivorian midfielder Didier Zokora was the main summer arrival, while the club resisted attempts by Milan to sign striker Luis Fabiano.

Sevilla have proved past masters at extracting top-of-the-range transfer fees for the likes of Dani Alves, Sergio Ramos and Julio Baptista, but they rejected Milan's £12million offer for Luis Fabiano, who appears to have accepted the decision with uncommonly good grace and will be an important figure as Sevilla look to return to the top tier of the European game.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
MANOLO JIMENEZ (SINCE OCTOBER 2007)
Has steered the Sevilla ship since stepping up from assistant coach following the departure of Juande Ramos to Tottenham, but he is not universally popular.

THE PLAYER
LUIS FABIANO
The Brazil international is destined to spend at least another season in Seville, despite being strongly linked with a move to Milan during the summer.

JIMENEZ PUTS HIS HOPES IN JESUS

Luis Fabiano and Freddie Kanoute remain a powerful front pairing in Sevilla's standard 4-4-2, while Jesus Navas will cause problems for most teams on the right. Zokora is likely to feature in central midfield. Right-back is a problem position, with the left-footed Adriano likely to start the season playing out of position.

SHERIFF (MOL)

Reach for the stars

The Moldovan 'upstarts' have already enjoyed their most successful Champions League campaign

On the ball...Sheriff

THEY may be only 12 years old, but Sheriff have already become Moldova's leading club. They have won every league title since 2001, but this year signals the furthest they have progressed in European competition – with Olympiakos standing between them and a historic place in the Champions League group stage.

"We have been close, but every time we just lacked something," says coach Leonid Koutchouk.

"Every time something went wrong – be it a dismissal, a deflection or a stupid mistake. But that's football."

The club's successful strategy has been to buy young players from all over the world and develop them before selling them on at a profit, and the current squad includes players from 10 different countries.

However, the club from Tiraspol – Moldova's second largest city – have wisely used some of those funds to invest in their own youth academy, which is now supplying first-team players on a regular basis.

Six years ago, Sheriff built a modern complex with space for two stadiums, six training pitches and an academy, and Romania's legendary midfielder Gheorghe Hagi told them: "You now have a stadium fit for the Champions League. The next step is to have a team in the group stages."

This year they have their best chance yet of achieving it.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
LEONID KOUTCHOUK (SINCE JANUARY 2004)
The Belarusian may not be very well known in his home country, but he has enjoyed great success in Moldova, winning six league titles with Sheriff and guiding them on their Champions League adventure.

THE PLAYER
FLORENT ROUAMBA
This Burkina Faso player is the lynch-pin of Sheriff's midfield triumvirate.

ATTACK IS THE POLICY FOR SHERIFF

In the early qualifers, Sheriff missed key players Abdoul-Gafar Mamah, Constantin Arbanas and Alexandr Erokhin through injuries, and the team struggled with Koutchouk's preferred 4-3-3. But two signings – Brazilian striker Franca and Serbian defender Vladimir Brankovic – have given the coach some new options.

SPORTING LISBON (POR)

Young at heart

They may have learned their lesson after last season's record defeat, but more experience is still needed

Sporting...chance

TOP priority this season for the Lions of Lisbon will be to win the Portuguese league title for the first time since 2002.

Four consecutive second-place finishes have guaranteed the club regular Champions League football and last term they finally made it past the group phase for the first time. However, it turned out to be an experience they would rather forget, as Paulo Bento's side were humiliated by Bayern Munich, losing 12-1 on aggregate – which set a new record margin of defeat in the competition.

One possible explanation for such a debacle was the shortage of experience in a squad that still lacks leadership and charisma.

With the coach still only 40, and captain Joao Moutinho just 22, what the squad really needs at the moment is someone who has been there, seen it and done it all at domestic or international level. The big problem, however, is players like that cost money – and that is something Sporting don't have a whole lot of.

The club's only major signing during the close season was Chile midfielder Matias Fernandez from Villarreal, though Ecuador striker Felipe Caicedo also arrived on a season-long loan deal from Manchester City.

The silver lining in the dark financial cloud was Sporting's ability to hold on to Moutinho and Miguel Veloso, two of their most talented players.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
PAULO BENTO (SINCE 2005)

Former international who starts his fifth season as Sporting coach looking to win his first league title. He is known for nurturing young talent, but can rely too heavily on inexperienced players.

THE PLAYER
LIEDSON
Has been Sporting's top scorer every season since signing from Corinthians in 2004, racking up more than 140 goals for the club.

TWIN STRIKERS LEAD THE WAY

Sporting are one of the few teams in Portugal who play with two strikers. Paulo Bento has always believed in a diamond formation and that won't change, with the club's all-time foreign-born top scorer Liedson leading the way. The Brazilian has a new partner this season with Caicedo adding some muscle.

STANDARD LIEGE (BLG)

New Standards

Hopes are high as Boloni takes the Belgian champions into the group stage for the first time

Looking to leave...Mbokani

ABOUT to take part in the group stage of the competition for the first time, the Belgian champions won't lack motivation and will be further aided by the intimidating wall of sound created by the fans at their Sclessin ground.

Unfortunately, though, the close season has not been particularly kind. American centre-back Oguchi Onyewu left on a Bosman for Milan and the atmosphere in the camp has been blighted by constant transfer rumours, with most of the club's bigger names linked with moves elsewhere on an almost daily basis.

Skipper and midfield general Steven Defour has clubs in Italy, England and Spain in hot pursuit, but at least he says he is happy to stay if the right offer does not come along. By way of contrast, strikers Milan Jovanovic and Dieumerci Mbokani have made it clear their aim is to take the high road. Should one or more of this trio leave, Standard are in trouble.

Although they are top dogs domestically, Standard are not awash with financial resources and prefer to cultivate their own talent rather than splash out on expensive signings. Most of the new arrivals are of the low-key variety, though the adaptable Cedric Collet (Mons), French prospect Jonathan Mendes (Auxerre) and Portuguese midfielder Tiago Ronaldo (Guimares) could all push for a starting place.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
LASZLO BOLONI (SINCE JULY 2008)

The ex-Romania midfielder was widely expected to adopt a rather dour approach on taking over from Michel Preud'homme. However, he has proved more audacious than his predecessor.

THE PLAYER
AXEL WITSEL
A product of the prolific Standard academy, his delicate touch, flair and versatility make the local lad a dangerous attacking weapon.

GIVING THE FANS WHAT THEY WANT

Standard supporters insist on a high-energy, attack-conscious style of football and this 4-3-3 formation pays due homage to their demands. The midfield is the key, with Defour the forceful yet cultured conductor, supported by Wilfrid Dalmat on the right and the trickery and incisiveness of Witsel on the left.

STUTTGART (GER)

Markus of class

Coach Babbel enjoyed an excellent first season, but how will the side cope without mecurial goal-machine Gomes?

Back in town...Hleb

THE Stuttgarters will be desperate to improve on their 2007-08 Champions League sortie, when they managed just three points and finished rock bottom of their group. The portents, though, are not good, especially in attack, where goal-machine Mario Gomez, who was sold to Bayern Munich, has left a huge void.

Zenit St Petersburg's Pavel Pogrebnyak is the man with the task of filling Gomez's boots, but it will be a difficult, if not impossible task as the Stuttgart attack was designed specifically to serve Gomez.

The club have, however, also been boosted by the return of former favourite Aleksandr Hleb on a season-long loan from European champions Barcelona.

In the second half of last season, Stuttgart were one of the form teams in Germany; slick and attractive in their attacking play, and brimming with indomitable spirit. Full marks go to novice coach Markus Babbel for turning an inconsistent collection of individuals into a united whole. He proved himself a natural.

Awash with young talent – the latest examples are schemers Timo Gebhart and Sebastian Rudy – the onus will be on the team's more experienced campaigners, such as keeper Jens Lehmann and international midfielder Thomas Hitzlsperger, to stop the Stuttgart boat rocking from uncontrolled enthusiasm.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
MARKUS BABBEL (SINCE NOVEMBER 2008)
The unassuming former Bayern Munich, Liverpool and Germany defender is exhibiting leadership skills no one knew he had.

THE PLAYER
THOMAS HITZLSPERGER
The captain and midfield enforcer has many roles: protecting the back four, spreading the ball around, breaking forward and unleashing that rocket-like left-foot shot of his.

PRAGMATIC BUT POSITIVE

Babbel's approach is very much like that of the national team under Jurgen Klinsmann and Joachim Low: attack-conscious, proactive and featuring a midfield made up of two holding players and two highly enterprising wide men. There's lots of panache, but leavened with a large dose of defensive pragmatism.

TIMISOARA (ROM)

Justice done

Having had their six-point deduction overturned, the Romanian runners-up are raring to go in Europe this term

Shakhtar gone...Timisoara celebrate

AT the end of a turbulent season, Timisoara secured their highest-ever league position last term, finishing in second place behind Unirea Urziceni.

However, their thoroughly deserved runners-up spot – and subsequent entry to the Champions League – was only confirmed after the club were handed back the six points that had been controversially deducted from them earlier in the year in an ongoing dispute over the club's history.

The ruling was fantastic news for Timisoara's players, officials and supporters, who had all been frustrated by what they felt was a "huge injustice" at the hands of UEFA, the Court of Arbitration for Sport and, in particular, the Romanian Football Federation, which Timisoara felt had failed to adequately defend the interests of one of its members.

Such frustration helped the club to pull together, and this unity was turned into results on the pitch by coach Ioan Sabau.

Formerly Mircea Lucescu's key player at Dinamo Bucharest and Brescia in the 90s, Sabau proved how well he has made the transformation to the coaching side of the game as Timisoara drew 2-2 on aggregate with Shakhtar Donetsk in the third qualifying round of the Champions League to knock out the UEFA Cup holders – and his mentor Lucescu – on away goals.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
IOAN SABAU (SINCE 2009)
Building a new team within just four months of taking over, Sabau is a highly professional coach who is always fair with himself, his players and the fans.

THE PLAYER
WINSTON PARKS
Having played for his native Costa Rica in the 2002 World Cup, he has experience with the likes of Lokomotiv Moscow and Slovan Liberec.

DIGNITY IN LABOUR

With goalkeeper Costel Pantilimon as their secure last line of defence, Timisoara work extremely hard as a unit from front to back. Armenian twin brothers Artiom and Arman Karamyan play a key role, while Gigel Bucur (with 16 goals last season) and Winston Parks are a constant threat on the counter attack.

UNIREA URZICENI (ROM)

Help the homeless

Petrescu is optimistic as Steaua Bucharest step in to save Urziceni's Champions League hopes

Just champion...Urziceni

COACH Dan Petrescu has targeted nothing less than a domestic double this season, and believes his side can also make their mark on the Champions League.

Even opposition owners refuse to mock such optimism, with Iuliu Muresan of CFR Cluj saying: "I consider that we have the best group of players, yet failed to win the league, while Dan managed a perfect job at Urziceni with more modest players."

However, with little money to sign top-class foreign players, last term's Romanian champions have had to cut their cloth accordingly and they have managed to bring in two internationals: defender Vasile Maftei, from Rapid Bucharest, and midfielder Sorin Paraschiv, from Italian Serie B side Rimini.

One possible problem for the team during their European campaign could be their lack of a home ground. With their 7,000-capacity Tineretului Stadium failing to meet UEFA requirements, the club were forced to look for an alternative venue.

Initially, the Austrian city of Klagenfurt offered to stage Urziceni's games, but the club's owner, Dumitru Bucsaru, turned them down as he didn't want Urziceni's poorer fans to miss out due to the travelling involved.

Fortunately, Steaua Bucharest boss Gigi Becali then stepped in and agreed to lend them his club's stadium – completely free of charge.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
DAN PETRESCU (SINCE SEPTEMBER 2006)

Won the Romanian title thanks to discipline, a professional attitude and his ability to get the best out of his players.

THE PLAYER
GEORGE GALAMAZ
Called up into Romania's national squad last year at the age of 27, he is an extremely reliable central defender who, as captain, leads by example.

CHANGE OF TACK

Having assembled a side largely from other teams' cast-offs, Petrescu has built a well-organised outfit that had the best defensive record in Romania last term. However, this season the coach is looking to change tactics, sharpening his team's sometimes blunt strike force while keeping things tight at the back.

VENTSPILS (LAT)

All change

Manager Grigorchuk and six key players have all walked away to leave the Latvians facing an uphill struggle

Doubling up...Ventspils

LESS than a week after beating BATE Borisov to reach the fourth qualifying round of the Champions League, the Latvian title holders parted company with their Russian coach, Roman Grigorchuk, and replaced him with Nunzio Zavettieri.

"I wish the new coach good luck," said Grigorchuk, who led Ventspils to a hat-trick of domestic league championships.

"This development was not a surprise to me as both parties took this decision a long time ago.

"My work at Ventspils will stay in my memory forever. We won a lot and I hope we have made the fans happy."

While the silverware may have pleased supporters, a lack of cash is more worrying, and financial difficulties meant the club had to slash the playing budget this term.

Six key performers – including last season's player of the year, goalkeeper Andris Vanins, who joined Sion of Switzerland – have left the club, and matters have not been helped by a string of injuries in the first half of this season, especially in defence.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
NUNZIO ZAVETTIERI (SINCE AUGUST 2009)
The Italian has worked with the youth teams of Milan and Internazionale, as well as being assistant coach at Udinese.

THE PLAYER
VITS RIMKUS

Despite celebrating his 36th birthday, the striker is his side's top scorer in the league this season.

YOU CAN'T BUY EXPERIENCE

Ventspils have attempted to compensate for their loss of personnel with the signing of experienced players such as Aleksejs Visnakovs from Skonto Riga and 38-year-old Vitalijs Astafjevs from Olimps Riga. They bolster a squad that has been used to playing 4-4-2 or 3-5-2 before the arrival of new boss Zavattieri.

WOLFSBURG (GER)

Fairy tale, part II?

Magath's moved on, but Wolfsburg look capable of keeping up the good work in his absence

Writing on the wall...Grafite

MANY Bundesliga watchers believe the bubble of fairy-tale champions Wolfsburg burst when miracle worker Felix Magath quit for Schalke in the off-season. Not so fast. While the intensely driven Magath will be sorely missed, the VW-sponsored team did not die with his departure and they must have every chance of making the knockout stage.

Incoming coach Armin Veh has kept the title-winning side intact. He has also recruited well, bringing in Danish creator Thomas Kahlenberg (Auxerre), Algerian dribbler Karim Ziani (Marseille), Germany Under-21 utility player Fabian Johnson (1860 Munich) and Nigerian striker Obafemi Martins (Newcastle United).

They may be young and have next to no Champions League experience, but Wolfsburg are very hungry and their midweek adrenaline rush should make them opponents to be wary of.

Once again they will bank on playmaker Zvjezdan Misimovic supplying the bullets for the prolific Brazilian-Bosnian strike force of Grafite and Edin Dzeko. But to prosper at the highest level it is also vital to have a sound defence and they are certainly not lacking in this department either.

Full-backs Sascha Riether and Marcel Schafer are both worthy of a call-up by Germany, while Italy's Andrea Barzagli and Czech Jan Simunek form a teak-tough central pairing. One possible problem could be the aching knees of Swiss keeper Diego Benaglio.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
ARMIN VEH (SINCE JULY 2009)
A figure of understated authority in stark contrast to Magath's sergeant-major persona, he took Stuttgart to the title in 2007.

THE PLAYER
EDIN DZEKO

The young £30million-rated Bosnian is one of the most complete strikers in world football today. Lethal in the air and with either foot, he'll be looking to continue his good form of last season.

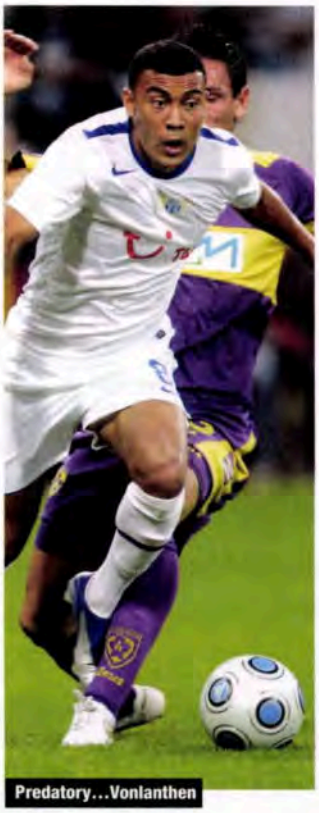
COMPACT BUT CREATIVE

Veh's default formation is a 4-4-2 built around a midfield diamond, which Josue anchors fastidiously. Compact, well-organised and particularly purposeful on the flanks – both full-backs push on at the drop of a hat – they are comfortable taking the initiative, but even more dangerous on the counter-attack.

FC ZURICH (SWI)

Into the unknown

The Swiss champions' ruthless boss is looking to write his own page in the club's history with group stage qualification


Predatory...Vonlanthen

HAVING been European Cup semi-finalists on two occasions – in 1964 and 1977 – FC Zurich certainly have a decent continental pedigree. Yet despite winning the Swiss title in three out of the past four years, they have never made it through to the group stage of the Champions League, so victory over Ventspils of Latvia in the fourth qualifying round would mean a dip in totally uncharted waters for the club.

Coach Bernard Challandes is determined to take his charges forward and showed his intentions by ruthlessly dropping goalkeeper Andrea Guatelli, replacing him with Johnny Leoni, after a dreadful performance against Slovenia's Maribor in the third qualifying round.

A big disadvantage for Zurich, however, will be the lack of a big-match feeling at their home matches. Their Letzigrund stadium, with its old-style running track around the pitch, has a rather lukewarm atmosphere and was barely a quarter full for that game against Maribor, effectively depriving Zurich of any major home advantage.

THE MAIN MEN

THE COACH
BERNARD CHALLANDES (SINCE SUMMER 2007)

Challandes led Zurich to the league title in only his second season in charge, having previously spent six years as coach of Switzerland's Under-21 team.

THE PLAYER
JOHAN VONLANTHEN
Became the youngest player to get a goal at the European Championships when he scored against France in 2004, aged 18.

HASSLI FREE AND A FINE FINNISH

Zurich usually line-up in a 4-5-1, with the back line built around club captain and Finland international Hannu Tihinen. Nigeria's Onyekachi Okonkwo and Vonlanthen provide the creative force in midfield, while Eric Hassli is normally preferred to Alexandre Alphonse as the lone striker working across the line.

EUROPA LEAGUE

AEK ATHENS (GRE)

Jump start...Makos climbs for AEK

THE last few years have seen AEK plagued by financial problems and constant changes in the team's administration, but they have managed to impress on the pitch and remain among the top clubs in the Greek league. The team has set its sights on advancing in the Europa League this season, though their skimpy budget has not allowed for any new blood to be brought in to bolster the squad. Pre-season was not too impressive, however, and coach Dusan Bajevic will once again be asked to get something extra special from his side.

THE COACH

Serbian boss Dusan Bajevic took charge for the second time in November 2008 and is the most successful coach in Greek history after spells at Olympiakos, PAOK Salonica and Aris Salonica.

KEY PLAYER

Rafik Djebbour is a great asset but has a habit of falling out with Bajevic and several of his team-mates.

AEK Athens 2009-10

The late signing of Brazilian striker Leonardo from Levadiakos is expected to give the team the scoring power that has been missing since the injury to the league's leading scorer last season, Ismael Blanco.

AJAX (HOL)

NEW coach Martin Jol will face a difficult task restoring order after the chaos of the past few years at the Amsterdam Arena. Last season, under Marco Van Basten, the club came nowhere near to winning any silverware, so the former Tottenham Hotspur and Hamburg boss knows what he must do. Despite the fact that Ajax aren't willing to pay big transfer fees for players these days, Jol has managed to sign experienced performers such as Timothee Atouba (Hamburg)

New-found maturity...Suarez

and Demy De Zeeuw (AZ). However, the defence still looks vulnerable and Jol's best hope for honours would appear to lie at home rather than abroad.

THE COACH

Martin Jol is a highly experienced coach who has the ability to revive Ajax's more glorious days.

KEY PLAYER

Luis Suarez once had a habit of diving and nagging but, as skipper, has turned into a team player almost overnight.

Ajax 2009-10

Jol prefers a 4-4-2 system to the club's traditional 4-3-3. But while experience is the key, youngsters such as Toby Alderweireld and Mitchell Donald could get some playing time. Suarez will create havoc for any defence.

AKTOBE (KAZ)

UNDER Russian coach Vladimir Mukhanov, Aktobe did the treble last year, winning the Supreme League, the Kazakhstan Cup and the Super Cup. Mukhanov relied heavily on experience, regularly fielding seven players over the age of 30 in his starting line-up, the most notable being midfielders Andrei Lavrik (ex-Lokomotiv Moscow) and

Winning feeling...for Aktobe

Konstantin Golovskoy (formerly of Spartak Moscow). This policy may have worked in domestic competitions, but it backfired in the third qualifying round of the Champions League against Maccabi Haifa when, after drawing the first leg 0-0 at home, they raced into a 3-0 lead after 15 minutes in the return, only to lose 4-3.

THE COACH

Vladimir Mukhanov led the club to league titles in 2007 and 2008.

KEY PLAYER

Murat Tleshev is a dangerous striker with an eye for goal.

Aktobe 2009-10

Defensively, Mukhanov relies on the experience of 31-year-old Samat Smakov, while in midfield the vital figures are veterans with Russian citizenship, Lavrik and Golovskoy. Tleshev in attack is known for his heading power.

AMKAR PERM (RUS)

First timers...Amkar out to impress

NAMED after the local chemicals plant in Perm, Amkar only joined the Russian top flight in 2004. They qualified for their first European campaign after finishing fourth in the 2008 Russian Premier League. They made rapid progress under Montenegrin coach Miodrag Bozovic, finishing fourth and reaching the Russian Cup Final last season, but they have struggled this year following his departure for FC Moscow. The club's 19,000 Zvezda stadium, with its artificial playing surface, has been approved by UEFA for use in Europa League games.

THE COACH

The 50-year-old Dimitar Dimitrov had spells as Bulgaria national coach and with Saudi Arabian clubs before joining Amkar in December 2008.

KEY PLAYER

Bulgarian striker Martin Kushev has been top scorer for the past two years. At 36, he is Amkar's oldest player.

Amkar Perm 2009-10

Amkar play a traditional 4-4-2 but lack experience. Jean Carlos will impress with his technical skills, while keeper Sergei Narubin and right-winger Georgi Peev are among the top players in the Russian League.

EUROPA LEAGUE

ASTON VILLA (ENG)

CRITICISED for not taking the UEFA Cup seriously last season when they fielded a weakened team against CSKA Moscow and failed to make the final 16, it is debatable whether Villa will give this term's competition any more importance, given that they face increased domestic competition from Manchester City. Whatever

Facing competition...Young

manager Martin O'Neill decides, he will have to do it without influential midfielder Gareth Barry, who has joined City, though Villa have continued to sign talented English players with the arrival of Stewart Downing, from Middlesbrough, and promising youngster Fabian Delph, from Leeds United.

THE MANAGER
Martin O'Neill is a thoughtful boss who enjoyed considerable success in Scotland with Celtic.

KEY PLAYER
Winger Ashley Young faces renewed competition from new arrival Downing, but he remains an exciting prospect.

Aston Villa 2009-10

It's hard to know how seriously O'Neill will take the Europa League. Whatever he decides, he will line-up with a straight 4-4-2 but there may be places for the likes of John Carew and youngster Delph.

ATHLETIC BILBAO (SPA)

Feeling the crunch...Athletic

ONE of Spain's oldest clubs, Athletic remain committed to their recruitment policy of only selecting players who are born in or close to the Basque country. Despite the restrictions this places on their ability to recruit the best talent, the club remain a highly competitive force within the Spanish league. They qualified for the Europa League after reaching the Spanish Cup Final, where they lost to Barcelona. After overcoming Swiss side Young Boys in the third qualifying round, Athletic now face Norway's Tromso, and hopes are high that their first European campaign since the 2004-05 season will not end prematurely.

THE COACH
Former Sevilla and Deportivo boss Joaquin Caparros joined two years ago.

KEY PLAYER
Spain striker Fernando Llorente has been attracting attention from the wealthier La Liga clubs.

Athletic Bilbao 2009-10

Athletic favour a compact 4-4-1-1 formation. The defensive solidity this gives is paired with the attacking threat provided by Francisco Yeste playing behind the main striker, Spain forward Fernando Llorente.

AUSTRIA WIEN (AUT)

TRADITIONALLY a technical but rather slow-paced team, since Karl Daxbacher took over the Viennese side have become very accomplished defensively. And now, thanks to the progress made by talented forward Rubin

Making it all happen...Acimovic

Okotie, who has been paired with Czech Republic striker Tomas Jun, they also have an abundance of goalscorers. As Austrian Cup winners, they were seeded in the Europa League third qualifying round, but had to work hard to overcome Novi Sad 5-3 on aggregate. A new stand's been opened at the Horr Stadium, which has added some flair to their small home ground.

THE COACH
Karl Daxbacher is an introvert, but the former star defender is a meticulous thinker and prefers tactical football.

KEY PLAYER
Slovenia's Milenko Acimovic has all it takes to become a top-class playmaker, though he does lack a little pace.

Austria Wien 2009-10

Daxbacher always makes sure his side are well prepared and he will put a lot of emphasis on defence. The team will look to former Red Star Belgrade and Tottenham midfielder Acimovic to create chances for the forwards.

BAKU (AZE)

LAST season's title triumph was quite an achievement for Baku, who were only established in 1997 and are sponsored by the Azerbaijani ministry of internal affairs. The club's Macedonian coach, Gjoko Hadzievski, has relied increasingly on foreign players, with a squad featuring 12 different nationalities, in a bid to play entertaining football. Baku are the country's most popular club, with 35,000 fans packing their Tofik Bakhramov stadium for the goalless first leg in the

New boys...Baku are aiming high

third qualifying round of the Champions League against Levski Sofia. A 2-0 defeat in the return ended their dreams.

THE COACH
Gjoko Hadzievski is vastly experienced, having managed the national teams of Macedonia and Azerbaijan.

KEY PLAYER
Baku's Brazilian midfielder Luis Ramim has scored three goals in eight games for Azerbaijan since being granted citizenship.

Baku 2009-10

Baku play 4-5-1, with Nigerian Ahmad Tijani as the target man and support from Argentinian Fernando Perez and Ramim. In defence the two Brazilians – Mendes Barbosa and Felipe – are the most influential players.

BASLE (SWI)

THE only Swiss side to have ever reached the last eight of the Champions League, Basle made some sweeping changes after a disappointing campaign last term in which they could only manage third place in the Super League. Long-serving coach Christian Gross was dispensed with and Thorsten Fink took over. Fink let a number of established players

Frei...back on target

go, including Eren Derdiyok, promoting youth team players to complement new signings, including the returning Alex Frei. The team made a promising start in Europe, beating Santa Coloma and Reykjavik in the early qualifying rounds of the competition.

THE COACH

Thorsten Fink, who was appointed in June, was previously at German second division side Ingolstadt.

KEY PLAYER

Alex Frei, Switzerland's all-time leading scorer, returned at the start of the season from Borussia Dortmund.

Basle 2009-10

Argentinian goalkeeper Franco Costanzo captains a side in which Benjamin Huggel plays a key role, sitting as the holding midfielder in front of the back four. Former Portugal Under-21 winger Carlitos provides width and the supply line for Frei in attack.

BATE BORISOV (BLS)

Krivets (right)...crucial up front

THE club from the provincial town of Borisov have established a strong domestic monopoly in Belarus after winning the league title in 2006, 2007 and 2008. They have also been successful in Europe, becoming the first Belarusian club to reach the group stage of the Champions League last time out. However, they failed to repeat those heroics on the continental stage this time, losing in the Champions League third qualifying round to Ventspils of Latvia on away goals. BATE have the country's best academy, which produces a good crop of promising players each year – Alexander Hleb began his career here.

THE COACH

Viktor Goncharenko, who at 32 is the youngest coach in the club's history, led BATE to the 2008 league title and the Champions League group stage.

KEY PLAYER

Sergei Krivets is the team's creative force but also scores plenty of goals.

BATE Borisov 2009-10

The pivotal role belongs to the mobile and prolific Krivets, with valuable support coming from the experienced Dmitri Likhtarovich and Ihar Stasevich. The fast-improving Maxsim Skavysh is a key element up front for Goncharenko's side.

BENFICA (POR)

ONCE again, Benfica started a new season with a new coach. It's been a recurring theme at the Estadio da Luz and the trend continued this summer with Jorge Jesus replacing Quique Sanchez Flores. The new man has been handed his first break with a big club after spending several seasons with smaller sides. The two-time European Champions have failed to qualify for the Champions League in the last two years and would love to have a long run in the Europa League. With plenty of new signings, the squad seems deep enough to

Benfica...new start

make it into the latter stages of the competition.

THE COACH

Jorge Jesus starts his first season at Benfica looking to reawaken Lisbon's sleeping giant.

KEY PLAYER

Pablo Aimar is a talented playmaker who struggled to make an impact in his first season at Benfica but has looked a different player since Jesus took over.

Benfica 2009-10

The new manager is a fan of attacking football and Javi Garcia from Real Madrid will anchor a midfield boasting plenty of flair with Aimar and Angel Di Maria. The partnership of Javier Saviola and Oscar Cardozo up front looks good.

BNEI YEHUDA (ISR)

Tough boss...Luzon

RECOVERED from flirting with relegation to secure a creditable fifth-place finish last season, the team from the Hatikva quarter of Tel Aviv are renowned as a family club, blessed with a tight-knit group of players and passionate fans from the locality. In contrast to their only previous European excursion (in the 2006-07 UEFA Cup) they have been granted permission to host ties at their Bloomfield Stadium. Three years ago they were forced to host Lokomotiv Sofia in Bratislava. Yet to concede a goal in six Europa League games.

THE COACH

Former Hapoel Tel Aviv boss Guy Luzon is a hard taskmaster who rarely stops bellowing and gesticulating at his players from the touchline. His uncle, Avi, is president of the Israeli FA.

KEY PLAYER

Fans were delighted this summer with the news that intelligent front runner Moshe Biton had signed a three-year contract extension.

Bnei Yehuda 2009-10

Whether they use Luzon's favoured 4-2-3-1 or go 4-4-2, the basic tenets of their game remain constant: tactical discipline, hard running and plenty of confidence. The attacking players lead the way in the pressing stakes.

EUROPA LEAGUE

BRONDBY (DEN)

BRONDBY defied the critics to reach the Europa League fourth qualifying round with a victory on away goals against Legia Warsaw. A stuttering start in the Danish Superliga has disappointed the fans, but two goals from defender Max Von Schlebrugge in a 2-2 away draw

Pressure...Jallow's goals are vital

in the second leg in Poland gave the club a welcome boost. Europe has often been a boon for Brondby, who famously reached the semi-finals of the UEFA Cup back in 1991, the best-ever performance by a Danish club in Europe. Reaching the group stage this time round would be a considerable achievement.

THE COACH
Kent Nielsen, the former defender, was part of Denmark's Euro 92-winning team and a player at Aston Villa.

KEY PLAYER
Max Von Schlebrugge is a rugged, robust defender from Sweden who scores his fair share of goals.

Brondby 2009-10

Perhaps not surprisingly, ex-stopper Nielsen sends out in a defence-minded side that is hard to break down but relies too heavily for its attacking inspiration on Gambian striker Ousman Jallow.

CFR CLUJ (ROM)

ROMANIA'S richest club – they have unofficially invested about £13million this term – suffered a last big pre-season blow when

Trica...treat

owner Arpad Paszkany was sued for allegedly bribing local media to discredit a business rival. Upheaval in the dugout has also seen the club change coach four times in the past two years. The latest incumbent, Antonio Conceicao, arrived in April and he has dealt with the loss of Alvaro Pereira to Porto by bringing in Brazilian defender Edimar, who spent last season with Sporting Braga in Portugal.

THE COACH
Diplomatic Portuguese coach Antonio Conceicao has calmed a divided dressing room that was split into Portuguese and South American groups last season.

KEY PLAYER
Eugen Trica is a clever playmaker who has returned to the club after a year in Cyprus with Anorthosis.

CFR Cluj 2009-10

Coach Conceicao expects a huge physical effort from his side, with 11 defenders and 10 forwards. He always keeps three genuine strikers on the pitch, with Yssouf Kone the main attacking force of the trio.

CLUB BRUGGE (BLG)

New start...Club aim for fluidity

THIRD in the Belgian league last season, the top Flemish outfit decided on a change of leadership this summer, dispensing with the services of coach Jacky Mathijssen and replacing him with ex-Ajax boss Adrie Koster. The theory is that the new man will make them more fluid and less reliant on set-pieces. Koster's rotation policy may prove controversial, especially if he continues to "rest" international Wesley Sonck. New faces include 18-year-old Brazilian left-back Cleber, from Juventude, and Ryan Donk, the Dutch centre-back from AZ Alkmaar who was on loan at West Bromwich Albion last term.

THE COACH
Adrie Koster was head of Ajax's academy before having a spell as caretaker coach of the first team.

KEY PLAYER
Morocco's Nabil Dirar brings vitality and invention to a number of attacking roles: striker, left winger or in the hole.

Club Brugge 2009-10

Koster favours a 4-4-2 template in which much depends on the three lines of the team staying compressed. Another option would be to use a 4-4-1-1, with Joseph Akpala as the spearhead and Dirar on his shoulder.

CSKA SOFIA (BUL)

HAVING reached semi-finals on three occasions, CSKA are the most successful Bulgarian club in European competition. However, since the political revolution of 1989, they have lost their dominant position and have been hit by a series of problems. The latest – and most serious – occurred last summer when, as champions, they were refused entry to the Champions League because their licence was withdrawn over unpaid debts. They faced a difficult task in reaching the Europa League

Lacking Euro know-how...Penev

group stage after being drawn against Dynamo Moscow in the final qualifying round.

THE COACH
Luboslav Penev is a big name in Bulgarian football but has little tactical experience of the European game.

KEY PLAYER
Defensive midfielder Todor Yanchev controls the pace and direction of CSKA's movements.

CSKA Sofia 2009-10

CSKA under Luboslav Penev play a 4-2-2-2 system, with Yordan Todorov in defence and Todor Yanchev in midfield as the key individuals, while goals are expected from Rui Miguel and Marquinhos up front.

DINAMO BUCHAREST (ROM)

NEW Italian coach Dario Bonetti must lift a team that was devastated to only finish third last term. Having lost some important investors, Bonetti's difficult task is to rebuild a team from scratch. However, he has been helped by the return on

Strong in air...Danciulescu

loan of international defender Gabriel Tamas from Auxerre, plus striker Marius Niculae's proposed move to Russian side Terek falling through. On the down side, international goalkeeper Bogdan Lobont is injured and he will not be ready for action until the end of the year.

THE COACH

Dario Bonetti had plenty of playing experience during his years with Roma, Sampdoria, Milan and Juventus, but his lack of previous top-level coaching could be Dinamo's biggest handicap.

KEY PLAYER

Ionel Danciulescu's strength in the air and ability in front of goal will be vital if Dinamo are to progress.

Dinamo Bucharest 2009-10

Experienced central defenders Tamas and Cosmin Moti, skilful midfielder Adrian Cristea and industrious strikers Claudiu Niculescu, Marius Niculae and Danciulescu give Dinamo hopes of a good Europa League run.

DINAMO ZAGREB (CRO)

ONCE again Croatian champions Dinamo failed to qualify for the Champions League group stages, this year falling to Austria's Salzburg in the third qualifying round. Things had looked promising after the first leg ended 1-1. But without their best player, Mario Mandzukic, they struggled in the return leg. They dropped into the final qualifying round of the Europa League, where Scotland's Hearts stood between them and a place in the group stage. Victory against

Speedy...Mandzukic

Hearts could decide the fate of Mandzukic, who was likely to move to the Bundesliga should Dinamo fail to progress.

THE COACH

Former international Krunoslav Jurcic is tipped for great things, though Dinamo's bosses would like to keep him for at least the next five years.

KEY PLAYER

Mario Mandzukic is a fast and efficient striker, but has had disciplinary problems in the past.

Dinamo Zagreb 2009-10

Dinamo are highly mobile, playing a one-touch game. Mandzukic has licence to roam across the front line. Attacks usually start on the left through full-back Etto, while Chile midfielder Pedro Morales is the set-piece expert.

DYNAMO MOSCOW (RUS)

Return...Kerzhakov

FINISHED third in the league last season but a surprise 2-0 home defeat by Celtic put them out of the Champions League, 2-1 on aggregate, in the third qualifying round. Champions of the USSR 11 times, they have yet to win the Russian title. The country's third richest club – after Zenit St Petersburg and Spartak Moscow – they will play their home games at the 18,000-seat Khimki arena this season while their own ground undergoes reconstruction. Having sold Igor Semshov and Danny to Zenit, they are short of quality.

THE COACH

Former midfielder Andrey Kobelev is a Dynamo playing legend of the 1990s who has been the club's coach since 2006 and is rated as one of Russia's most promising young managers.

KEY PLAYER

Ex-Zenit striker Aleksandr Kerzhakov returned to Russia in 2008 after just one season with Sevilla.

Dynamo Moscow 2009-10

The Kombarov twins – Kirill and Dmitri – support lone striker Kerzhakov from the flanks, while veteran playmaker Dmitri Khokhlov controls the midfield. Denis Kolodin's shooting makes him dangerous at free-kicks.

ELFSBORG (SWE)

AT the start of the season, 12 out of 16 Swedish top-flight coaches thought Elfsborg would win the 2009 Allsvenskan and, so far, those predictions look good. Despite a few under-par away days, and an attack which has not quite slipped into top

Settled in...Keene

gear, they remain very much in contention for a close-run title. One of their chief assets is their hard core of international experience, with a spine consisting of central defender Teddy Lucic and midfielders Anders Svensson and Stefan Ishizaki. Following the departure of popular goalkeeper Johan Wiland to FC Copenhagen, Australia's Ante Covic arrived from Newcastle Jets.

THE COACH

Magnus Haglund plotted Elfsborg's 2006 Swedish title success.

KEY PLAYER

Opportunist ex-Portsmouth striker James Keene has carved out a niche for himself in Sweden.

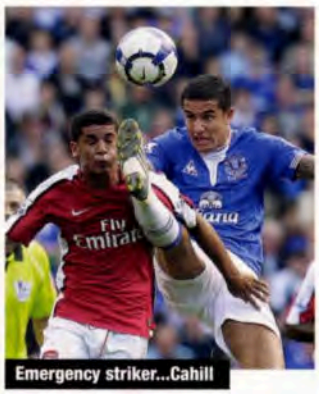
Elfsborg 2009-10

Haglund prefers to play with a basic 4-2-3-1 formation. However, Elfsborg are able to quickly switch to either 4-3-3, 4-1-3-2 or 4-4-2 without losing their shape. Fast counter-attacks are a particular speciality.

EUROPA LEAGUE

EVERTON (ENG)

UNTIL the arrival of Manchester City's millions, Everton had established themselves as the team most likely to break into the Premier League top four. However, a lack of significant signings this summer reflects the club's restricted financial


Emergency striker...Cahill

status – as has City's seemingly endless pursuit of Joleon Lescott. They were unlucky with injuries last term and creative midfielder Miguel Arteta, Nigerian striker Yakubu and England defender Phil Jagielka all missed the start of this season. The Europa League draw has been kinder than last season's UEFA Cup, where they had a disappointing exit to Standard Liege.

THE COACH
David Moyes is the Premier League's longest-serving manager after Alex Ferguson and Arsene Wenger.

KEY PLAYER
Tim Cahill's versatility saw him used as an emergency striker last season.

Everton 2009-10

With it looking highly likely that Lescott will be sold – and his natural replacement Jagielka injured – Moyes will be forced to buy a new central defender or drop highly promising teenager Jack Rodwell into the back line.

FENERBAHCE (TUR)

TURKEY'S richest and best-supported team, with 35,000 season tickets sold for this season despite last term's disappointing fifth-place league finish. Newly re-elected chairman Aziz Yildirim, having pledged to win the league title for the next three years, has embarked on a Real Madrid-style spending spree, bringing in internationals Mehmet Topuz from Kayserispor and Ozer Hurmaci from Ankaraspor, as well as Andre Santos and Cristian from Corinthians – who join fellow Brazilians Alex, Roberto Carlos, Gokcek Vederson and Deivid.

New...Andre Santos and Cristian

And coach Christoph Daum is back after a three-year absence.

THE COACH
German Christoph Daum has returned to Turkey and under pressure to repay his £4m annual salary.

KEY PLAYER
Brazilian Alex is in his sixth season as midfield orchestrator for Fener.

Fenerbahce 2009-10

Fenerbahce like to play 4-5-1, with Alex sitting behind lone Spanish striker Daniel Guiza. Their game relies on support down the flanks from London-born Colin Kazim-Richards, Gokhan Gonul and Andre Santos.

FULHAM (ENG)

Schemer... Murphy

HAVING only preserved their Premier League status on the final day of the 2007-08 season, little was expected of the London side last term. But cute transfer dealings and clever coaching by Roy Hodgson saw them finish seventh, their highest-ever placing. Hodgson has stuck to a passing game and got the best from once-inconsistent defenders such as Paul Konchesky, Aaron Hughes and John Pantsil. Doubts remain over strength in depth, especially if centre-back Brede Hangeland – a huge success since joining from FC Copenhagen – is sold. Damien Duff has come in to add strength down the left. Their campaign got off to a flier with a 6-0 aggregate defeat of Lithuania's Vetra.

THE COACH
Roy Hodgson brings a wealth of continental experience to Fulham.

KEY PLAYER
Captain Danny Murphy plays a crucial role as the midfield schemer.

Fulham 2009-10

Hodgson always puts out a well-organised side that sticks to a 4-4-2 formation, utilising a short-passing game orchestrated by Murphy and with important contributions from Clint Dempsey and goal poacher Andy Johnson.

GALATASARAY (TUR)

THE Istanbul club made all the headlines in Turkey during the summer with the hiring of Frank Rijkaard as coach and some top-calibre signings, such as Argentina goalkeeper Leo Franco from Atletico Madrid, Ivory Coast winger Abdul Kader Keita from Lyon and Brazil midfielder Elano from Manchester City. As a result, expectations are sky high.

On target...Kewell

Galatasaray are the only Turkish team to have won European prizes – the UEFA Cup and Super Cup in 2000 – and the early signs appear to be that Rijkaard is creating a team that will score plenty of goals.

THE COACH
Frank Rijkaard arrived in Istanbul as the most important signing of the summer after admitting Gala made him an offer he couldn't refuse.

KEY PLAYER
Young striker Arda is the country's most exciting prospect.

Galatasaray 2009-10

Ideally, Rijkaard would like to get Gala playing a 3-4-3 system, but for now he may just stick to last season's tried-and-tested 4-4-2 formation, which is based around the talents of experienced Czech Republic striker Milan Baros.

GENK (BLG)

THE epitome of inconsistency in the last two domestic campaigns, the Limburg club showed far more resolve and purpose in their capture of the 2008-09 Belgian Cup – a split personality which, ironically, might augur well for their ninth campaign of European football. New coach

And the winners are...Genk

Hein Vanhaezebrouck knows he must find a remedy for his side's lack of killer instinct. Too often they have won the possession and territorial battles, only to fail to deliver the knockout blow. He says they must develop a "warrior mentality". They will miss winger Tom De Mul, who has returned to Sevilla after a loan spell.

THE COACH

Hein Vanhaezebrouck is a strong character with strong principles, who once criticised his club's own fans for insulting their opponents.

KEY PLAYER

Fabien Camus is a gifted attacking midfielder or forward who was bought from Charleroi in the summer.

Genk 2009-10

A 3-4-3 suits Vanhaezebrouck's wholehearted temperament perfectly. He looks for his team to dominate possession and flood forward, convinced that if his side dictate terms, a three-man defence is more than adequate.

GENOA (ITA)

ONE of the stories of last season's Serie A campaign, Genoa finished fifth – their highest league placing for 19 years. However, they sold their two best players, the Brazilian midfielder Thiago Motta and Argentinian striker Diego Milito, to Internazionale over the summer and may struggle to repeat last year's achievements. Hernan Crespo has big shoes to

Crunch time...can Genoa turn it on?

fill in taking over from Milito, but he will receive strong support from compatriot Rodrigo Palacio, newly signed from Boca Juniors. Meanwhile, former Spain Under-21 Alberto Zapater has arrived from Zaragoza to reinforce central midfield.

THE COACH

Gian Piero Gasperini oversaw Genoa's return to Serie A in 2007.

KEY PLAYER

Hernan Crespo, who joined from Inter on a free transfer, will provide much-needed European know-how.

Genoa 2009-10

Genoa play an attacking 3-4-3 formation, with three outright strikers and rising talent Domenico Criscito pushing forward on the left. Moroccan Houssine Kharja offers creativity in midfield.

GUINGAMP (FRA)

QUITE rightly, no one will give the French second division outfit any chance of success in Europe. But the big question is

Industrious...Colleau

whether Guingamp themselves will pay the competition any serious attention as there is a real danger that it may distract the French Cup winners from their primary objective of getting back into Ligue 1. Guingamp finished 13th last season and have lost their star man, Brazilian striker Eduardo, to promoted Lens. On paper they haven't a cat in hell's chance in the Europa League, but coach Victor Zvunka is a bullish optimist who believes anything is possible. Not many will agree.

THE COACH

Victor Zvunka arrived at Guingamp in 2007 and led his side to French Cup victory over Rennes in May.

KEY PLAYER

Fabrice Colleau is a hard-working, technically adept midfielder who is industrious rather than flash. He typifies the team's spirit and is prepared to get physical if need be.

Guingamp 2009-10

Most often relied on a 4-3-2-1 system last season, with the departed Eduardo acting as a roving lone striker. If Guingamp succeed in luring striker Matt Moussilou from Nice expect more of the same.

HAMBURG (GER)

PERENNIAL August champions, full of confidence with lofty expectations in pre-season, only for the dreams to gradually fade. This time around, however, they might just have a team worthy of the summer hype. The Europa League Final – due to be held on

Strong...Guerrero gets physical

their own ground next May – is the aim and they certainly have the firepower to go all the way, with the Peruvian-Croat combo of Paolo Guerrero and Mladen Petric reinforced by excellent frontline additions in the shape of Sweden Under-21 Marcus Berg, from Groningen, and Eljero Elia, from Dutch side Twente.

THE COACH

Former Hamburg striker Bruno Labbadia fell out with the Leverkusen board towards the end of last season and jumped at the chance to replace the Ajax-bound Martin Jol.

KEY PLAYER

Brazilian midfielder Ze Roberto, 35, may have been surplus to requirements at Bayern but he still offers class, composure and energy in the centre.

Hamburg 2009-10

All you need to know about Labbadia's footballing philosophy is that he would much rather win 4-3 than 1-0. Any team of his goes for the throat from the outset, with short, snappy combination play.

HAPOEL TEL AVIV (ISR)

Target man...Yeboah

NO one wearing the red of Hapoel should ever regard Europe as "mission impossible" as they only have to cast their minds back to the 2001-02 UEFA Cup when the club went on a giant-killing spree, eliminating Chelsea, Lokomotiv Moscow and Parma before losing to Milan in the quarter-finals. The legacy seems alive and well, and this season they have already put out Gothenburg. Runners-up in the Israeli league last term, they have kept personnel changes to a minimum during the summer, signing only left-back Dedi Ben Dayan from Maccabi Netanya and midfielder Michael Zandberg from Beitar Jerusalem.

THE COACH
Eli Guttman led Hapoel Haifa to the domestic title a decade ago.

KEY PLAYER
Samuel Yeboah, the nephew of former Ghana striker Anthony Yeboah, has the same goalscoring genes and was on target 15 times last season.

Hapoel Tel Aviv 2009-10

Guttman is a fan of Dutch football and observed Johan Cruyff's training sessions at Barcelona. On European nights he will be more conservative, relying on two banks of four and the occasional swift break.

HEARTS (SCO)

A FEW years ago the club's Lithuanian owner Vladimir Romanov made the outlandish claim that Hearts would one day win the Champions League. For now they are just delighted to be back in Europe. While much of their success last season was based on physical power and

Bringing cohesion...Laszlo

tight organisation, they also have players who can prosper at this level, such as midfielders Andrew Driver and Laryea Kingston. But Driver misses the first six weeks of the season through injury, which is a major blow, and despite a high turnover of forwards, they are yet to find a proven scorer, which could be their undoing in Europe.

THE COACH
Csaba Laszlo has achieved the near impossible by bringing cohesion to a Hearts side decimated and demoralised by the antics of club owner Romanov.

KEY PLAYER
Laryea Kingston was not at his best last season, but the little Ghanaian can still be their driving force.

Hearts 2009-10

Hearts are increasingly strong and well organised both in defence and midfield. Most of their attacking moves start down the left, where they rely on the pace and crosses of English winger Driver.

HEERENVEEN (HOL)

Elm...must come to the fore

DESPITE having been in the Dutch top flight without any interruption since 1993, and reaching the Dutch Cup Final twice before, Heerenveen only grabbed their first trophy last season, when they beat Twente on penalties in the Cup Final. However, whether Trond Sollied's relaxed attitude can bring European success as well as domestic triumph is debatable. Having lost key midfielder Danijel Pranjic to Bayern Munich, the incoming players have been relatively unknown. Apart from that, their defence concedes too many goals.

THE COACH
Norwegian coach Trond Sollied has won five national cups with various clubs and is known for his attacking brand of football.

KEY PLAYER
Viktor Elm, a Sweden international who is one of three footballing brothers, is an inconspicuous but vital player and could become even more important since Pranjic's departure.

Heerenveen 2009-10

Heerenveen will play with former Sheffield Wednesday player Gerald Sibon as the target man. Martin Lejsal has joined on loan from Czech side Brno as cover for the injured goalkeeper Kenny Steppe.

HERTHA BERLIN (GER)

DEFENSIVELY mean, and extremely adept at making the most of the relatively few goalscoring chances that come their way, the Hertha of last term looked perfectly suited to the European chess game. But in the close season the cash-strapped outfit seeped talent on and off the pitch as general manager Dieter Hoeness, inspirational Croat central defender Josip Simunic, and strikers Andriy Voronin and Marko Pantelic all

Midfielder...Kacar

left. Fresh faces are conspicuous by their absence, but at least they still have some trump cards, namely deep-lying Brazilian attacker Raffael and midfielders Cicero and Gojko Kacar.

THE COACH
Lucien Favre was elegance personified in his playing career for Switzerland, Servette and Toulouse, and he has acquired a prickly, ruthless streak on entering the team-leadership business.

KEY PLAYER
Arne Friedrich has the all-important task of holding the rearguard together.

Hertha Berlin 2009-10

Hertha's *catenaccio*-inspired game plan is seldom spectacular to watch but is immensely effective. No team in the Bundesliga is better at sitting back and waiting for the right moment to strike.

KARABAKH (AZE)

Honka hit...Karabakh progress

FROM the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Karabakh won the Azerbaijan Cup last season to gain passage to the Europa League this year. They surprised many of their fans by passing through the second and third rounds of the qualifiers, defeating Norwegian powerhouse Rosenborg (1-0) and Honka of Finland (3-1). Nicknamed the Stallions because of the region's famous horses, they have relied heavily on home-grown players and have only one foreigner in their ranks, Albania defender Admir Teli. Due to the military conflict in the region, the club have been forced to play their "home" league matches in the Azerbaijan capital Baku.

THE COACH

Gurban Gurbanov led Karabakh to the Azerbaijan Cup in his first season.

KEY PLAYER

Azerbaijan's Vagif Dzhavadov is a skilful forward who graduated from CSKA Moscow's academy.

Karabakh 2009-10

Gurbanov's preferred option is 4-5-1. He fully trusts Azerbaijan international Elnur Allahverdiyev with the commanding role in defence while creative midfielder Rashad Sadygov combines well with feisty forward Vagif Javadov.

KOSICE (SLK)

LAST season's Slovakian Cup winners will need to beat Roma to reach the group stages of the Europa League – but stranger things have happened. As IFC Kosice, the steelworkers' team made the group stages of the Champions League 10 years ago, twice playing Manchester United. Reformed in 2005 as MFK Kosice, under former Czech international Jan Kozak, a young side sprinkled with key Serbian imports impressed to finish fourth in last season's Slovakian league. In the Europa League,

Good times...back at Kosice

they dispatched Slavija Sarajevo as easily as they did Petrzalka in last May's Cup Final.

THE COACH

Former Lokomotiva Kosice player Jan Kozak has been at the club since its reformation in July 2005 and has won the league and cup in Czechoslovakia and Slovakia as a player and coach.

KEY PLAYER

Marko Milinkovic is a driving midfielder with a strong left-foot shot, who is now a regular for Serbia's Under-21s.

Kosice 2009-10

The motor in the Kosice machine is Serb playmaker Milinkovic, who feeds the prolific Jan Novak and his forward partner David Skutka. Eliminate Milinkovic from the game and you will almost certainly eliminate Kosice.

LAZIO (ITA)

ITALIAN Cup winners Lazio began this season with a surprise victory over Serie A champions Internazionale in the Italian Super Cup, played in Beijing. And that victory will have provided a boost after a difficult summer during which a number of key

Zarate kick...Mauro's menace

players appeared to be unsettled in Rome. The future of Lorenzo De Silvesti and Argentinian duo Cristian Ledesma and Mauro Zarate – last season's star turn – appeared in doubt. However, Lazio did bring in another Argentinian, striker Julio Cruz, on loan from Inter. The days of Lazio's free spending under Sven Goran Eriksson are long gone, but the Rome club look a good bet to progress beyond the Europa League group stage.

THE COACH

Well-travelled former Cagliari and Palermo boss Davide Ballardini arrived in Rome this summer.

KEY PLAYER

Forward Mauro Zarate exploded onto the Serie A scene last season.

Lazio 2009-10

Lazio generally play a straight 4-4-2, with Zarate playing off a main striker – either Tomasso Brocchi or Julio Cruz – and Matuzalem or Ledesma pulling the Romans' creative strings in midfield.

LECH POZNAN (POL)

Great start...Zielinski

STRONGLY supported by fans from the region of the country known as Greater Poland, Lech average 16,500 per game – the highest attendance in the country. However, with their Miejski stadium currently undergoing renovation ahead of Euro 2012, they are having to temporarily play 35 miles away in Wronki, where they lost 2-1 to Fredrikstad of Norway in the third qualifying round. They narrowly avoided bankruptcy in 2006 thanks to a merge with Amica Wronki and are now one of the best-run clubs in the Ekstraklasa. The last of their five national championships came in 1993.

THE COACH

Jacek Zielinski only took over in June, but he made a great start, winning his first game – away to Fredrikstad – 6-1.

KEY PLAYER

Robert Lewandowski is a talented young striker who is a composed and accurate finisher.

Lech Poznan 2009-10

Prefer to play 4-4-2, making the most of Bartosz Bosacki and his Colombia defensive partner Manuel Arboleda, Bosnia playmaker Semir Stilic and strikers Hernan Rengifo, of Peru, and Lewandowski.

EUROPA LEAGUE

LEVADIA TALLINN (EST)

WITH four league titles in the past five years, Levadia are easily the dominant force in Estonian football, but they are still waiting to make the breakthrough in Europe. Their win over Poland's Wisla Krakow in this season's Champions League second qualifying round was the club's biggest achievement since 2006 (when they beat Dutch side Twente). They went out to Hungary's Debrecen in

Puri...class

the next round and coach Igor Prins feels their biggest problem is bridging the gap between a weak domestic league and a far superior European competition. "We are not used to playing a number of high-level games in a row," he says.

THE COACH
Former international Igor Prins won the title in his debut season as a coach.

KEY PLAYER
Sander Puri is reportedly being watched by Werder Bremen and Borussia Dortmund.

Levadia Tallinn 2009-10

Coach Prins has Levadia playing a well balanced 4-4-2 and, when necessary, he can call upon some useful substitutes, such as 34-year-old former national team forward Indrek Zelinski, who won more than 100 caps.

LILLE (FRA)

LILLE went through a difficult and somewhat bizarre summer when coach Rudi Garcia was sacked in June – and then reinstated two weeks later with a new three-year contract after alleged target Paul Le Guen failed to agree a deal. Considering they

Born leader...Mavuba

finished fifth last term it had always seemed an odd move to oust the former Le Mans boss, but the uncertainty around the club's direction certainly hindered pre-season recruitment. Lille lost star man Michel Bastos to Lyon, but did bring in Brazilian midfielder Gervinho from Le Mans and PSG's former international keeper Mickael Landreau, who then suffered a serious knee injury in training.

THE COACH
The re-instating of Rudi Garcia should give him free reign to impose his will.

KEY PLAYER
Rio Mavuba is a quality defensive midfielder who is tenacious, hard-working and a born leader.

Lille 2009-10

Lille tend to play with a typically attacking 4-3-3 line-up at home and then revert to a more conservative 4-1-4-1 when away with a single striker leading the line and a shielding player ahead of the back four.

LITEX LOVECH (BUL)

Litex get the winning feeling...again

FROM the provincial city of Lovech, Litex are a phenomenon in Bulgarian football. They only reached the top flight in 1997, became champions the following season and have taken part in European competition in every season since 1998 bar one. However, their European achievements have not yet matched their ambition. This year they faced a tough task after being drawn against BATE Borisov of Belarus. They recently lost Stanislav Manolev to PSV Eindhoven, but have plenty of experience in the likes of Radostin Kishishev, Svetoslav Todorov and Hristo Yanev.

THE COACH
Former national coach Stanimir Stoilov enjoyed success at Levski Sofia and now has the same ambitions for Litex.

KEY PLAYER
Radostin Kishishev is back in Bulgaria after eight years in England with Charlton Athletic, Leeds and Leicester.

Litex Lovech 2009-10

Litex generally favour a 4-2-1-3 system, with Radostin Kishishev and Nebojsa Jelenkovic as the defensive midfielders, Brazilian Sandrinho more advanced and international forward Svetoslav Todorov as the main striker.

MARIBOR (SLN)

REIGNING champions Maribor began their defence of the Slovenian championship indfferently, with two defeats followed by two hard-fought victories – form which hardly suggested they would threaten

Celebration time...Maribor

Sparta Prague in the Europa League's final qualifying round. Fears that Brazilian striker Marcos Tavares, who was voted the league's best player last season, would leave in the summer have so far proved unfounded. While that news should boost confidence and help the side repeat their domestic title triumph, success in Europe may well prove to be more difficult.

THE COACH
Darko Milanic is a hard taskmaster who demands total commitment, especially from his back line.

KEY PLAYER
Skipper and experienced midfielder Zoran Pavlovic dictates the pace and links well with his defence.

Maribor 2009-10

Maribor normally play a classic 4-4-2, but are flexible depending on the opposition. Coach Milanic relies on a strong defensive line, but he does encourage full use of both flanks in attack and likes to see his wide men interchange.

METALIST KHARKIV (UKR)

THIRD in the league for the third year running, Kharkiv paid the price for a lack of quality in the final weeks of last season as they failed to reach the final of the Ukraine Cup and lost the battle for the second Champions League spot to Shakhtar. So not surprisingly, they were the busiest Ukrainian club in the transfer

Top stopper...Gueye

window, signing Argentinian defender Hernan Fredes on loan from Independiente, vastly experienced midfielder Oleh Shelayev from Dnipro, promising forward Volodymyr Lysenko from Dynamo Kyiv, Finland's Alexei Eremenko from Saturn of Russia and Georgia Under-21 forward Vakhtang Pantskhava on loan from French club Le Mans.

THE COACH

Miron Markevich has made Metalist the country's third-best team and he holds the league record for matches as coach.

KEY PLAYER

Papa Gueye was named the best central defender in Ukraine last season.

Metalist Kharkiv 2009-10

Markevich favours a classic 4-4-2, with Gueye and Milan Obradovic in central defence, Shelayev and Serhiy Valyayev crucial in midfield and Dynamo Kyiv academy graduates Lysenko and Oliynyk up front.

METALURH DONETSK (UKR)

Leader...Makrides

RELATIVELY new on the Ukraine football map, having been established in 1996 as the amateur team of Donetsk Metal Works, Metalurh's rapid rise reflects the close relationship between politics, big business and the new generation of Ukrainian oligarchs. Thanks to lavish investment by steel producer Industrial Donbass Union, they have become a footballing power. Last season Donetsk's second club finished fourth in the league and they reinforced their squad this summer with Zimbabwean forward Musawengosi Mguni from Al-Shabab in the UAE and midfielder Olexiy Hodin from Metalurh Zaporizhya.

THE COACH

Coach Nikolay Kostov was recruited in the April of 2008 after mixed fortunes in Cyprus and Armenia.

KEY PLAYER

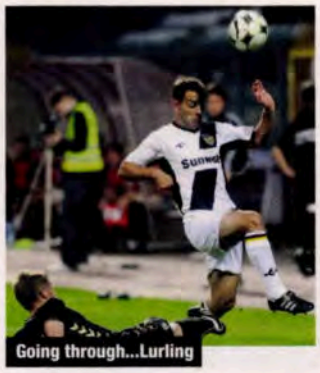
27-year-old Constantinos Makrides is the main midfield orchestrator.

Metalurh Donetsk 2009-10

Armenia's Mkhitaryan, Makrides of Cyprus and Serbia's Dorde Lazic form a holding triangle, while Sunny Kingsley and Olexiy Hodin interchange on the flanks. Tall newcomer Mguni is a hard-working, skilful forward.

NAC BREDA (HOL)

WHEN Robert Maaskant took over from Ernie Brandts last season, nobody believed he would do better. After all, under Brandts the Breda club had finished third, only to lose their European ticket in the play-offs. Although Maaskant took NAC


Going through...Lurling

to eighth, he surpassed himself by winning the end of season play-offs. So NAC were the last team to finish last season and the first to start this, with wins over Armenia's Gandzasar and Polonia Warsaw meaning the European ride continues. But with Villarreal up in the fourth qualifying round, their chances of progressing looked slim.

THE COACH

Robert Maaskant became assistant to his father, Bob, at Go Ahead Eagles in 1996, having got his required coaching diplomas at 19.

KEY PLAYER

Ghana's Matthew Amoah is highly dangerous in the penalty area and could be on his way to a bigger club.

NAC Breda 2009-10

NAC Breda play a 4-3-3 with a solid backline led by the towering Rob Penders and Patrick Zwaanswijk in central defence. Amoah is a prolific goalscorer, while wingers Kolkka and Lurling combine skill and speed.

NACIONAL (POR)

NACIONAL equalled a club record by finishing fourth in the league last season but will struggle to repeat such a feat after losing central defender Maicon (to Porto) and striker Nene (to Cagliari). Nene's 20 goals in 28 games were largely responsible for the Madeira club making it back into Europe for a third time. Their home stadium has gained notoriety as one of the toughest places to play in Portugal and they will have to rely on a strong

Skill in the middle...Micael

record at Choupana if they are going to have a good season.

THE COACH

Manuel Machado is one of Portugal's most astute tacticians and is known for long, philosophical speeches about the need for discipline and teamwork. He has a record of helping ordinary sides to overachieve.

KEY PLAYER

Ruben Micael is a skilful central midfielder who was linked with Benfica in the summer. A box-to-box player with an eye for goal.

Nacional 2009-10

Machado has played counter-attacking football ever since he became a coach. The capture of Slovenia's Nejc Pecnik will boost the quality of a team already boasting plenty of talent in the centre of the park.

EUROPA LEAGUE

OB ODENSE (DEN)

OB qualified in style for the Europa League fourth qualifying round with a comprehensive 7-3 aggregate victory against Rabotnicki of Macedonia, which was inspired by a hat-trick in the away leg from new Brazilian signing Caca. Essentially a vibrant team that has been made in Denmark, there is now also significant African influence with Gambia striker Njogu Demba-

Sky's the limit...Utaka

Nyren, Nigerian forward Peter Utaka and Cameroon midfielder Eric Djemba-Djemba, once of Manchester United and Aston Villa. They are full of confidence after a good start to the Danish Superliga.

THE COACH

Lars Olsen, captain of Denmark's successful Euro 92 team, has been in charge at Odense for two years now.

KEY PLAYER

Caca, a lively young Brazilian midfielder with a promising name and a taste for goals, who was signed in the summer from AaB Aalborg.

OB Odense 2009-10

An adventurous side that likes to attack and always tries to play with style and fluidity. The experience of Djemba-Djemba is vital in central midfield because their free-flowing game can leave them vulnerable.

PAOK SALONICA (GRE)

PAOK are coming off a good last season, finishing second, though they failed to win the post-season play-off to earn a spot in the Champions League qualifying round. Club president Theo Zagorakis, voted the most valuable player of Euro 2004

Celebrations in qualifying...PAOK

when Greece were the surprise winners, has managed to do well in the summer transfer market, bringing in new talent in a move to challenge the big Athens clubs for top spot. The club has also managed to stir enough interest with supporters that season tickets sold out for the first time.

THE COACH

Fernando Santos took over the squad in September 2007 after good seasons with AEK and Panathinaikos, and his determination helped lift PAOK to a surprise second place last season.

KEY PLAYER

The pacy 20-year-old attacking midfielder Vasilios Koutsianikoulis is considered a hot prospect and has been called up for the national team.

PAOK Salonica 2009-10

Santos likes to use a defensive-minded system which relies on his attacking midfielders getting forward to support lone striker Ilias Anastasakos. Koutsianikoulis is often used as an impact player from the bench.

PARTIZAN BELGRADE (SER)

Making them tick...Moreira

HAVING failed to reach the Champions League, Partizan's target now will be to do better than they did in last season's UEFA Cup group stage, when they suffered four defeats in four matches. They remain solid at the back, even if they do sell international left-back Ivan Obradovic. Cleo and Lamine Diarra in attack, together with young midfielders Nemanja Tomic and Adem Ljajic, offer huge potential. The weakness is a lack of quality opposition at domestic level. Put simply: Partizan are too good for Serbia, but not good enough for Europe.

THE COACH

Former Yugoslavia midfielder Slavisa Jokanovic won domestic honours in his first coaching job, but faced criticism for Partizan's Champions League defeat to APOEL.

KEY PLAYER

Almami Moreira, the playmaker from Guinea-Bissau, is the creative driving force in Partizan's midfield.

Partizan Belgrade 2009-10

Partizan play with two strikers and two attacking midfielders, plus playmaker Moreira, who is a crucial man for this team. Ljajic (on loan from Manchester United) has great potential, but must learn to play with more pace.

PSV EINDHOVEN (HOL)

FOR the first time in 12 years PSV are not in the Champions League, and the Eindhoven club are well aware that they can't afford another disastrous season (they finished fourth last year). New coach Fred Rutten fits the club culture better than his predecessor Huub Stevens, and Rutten has already clinched his first European success by eliminating Bulgarian club Cherno More 2-0 on aggregate.

Cherno no More...PSV ease through

Their last opponents before the Europa League group stage were Israeli club Bnei Yehuda – a team that shouldn't have given them too much trouble.

THE COACH

Fred Rutten was successful at Twente but then failed at Schalke. He has been praised for his coaching skills but lacks media exposure.

KEY PLAYER

Ibrahim Afellay is the midfield maestro of Moroccan descent who should be able to spur his side on in Europe – providing he remains fit.

PSV Eindhoven 2009-10

With attacking midfielder Afellay as their key, Andre Ooijer, Timmy Simons and Orlando Engelaar will look after the defensive duties, while Balazs Dzsudzsak is a lively winger. Up front Ola Toivonen will get the nod over Danko Lazovic.

RAPID WIEN (AUT)

Making play...Hofmann

RAPID have not changed their style since they lost to Everton in the 1985 Cup-winners Cup Final. They are still a powerful, aggressive side who are very strong at home. Supported by sell-out crowds of 22,000 fans, Hanappi Stadium has become an almost impregnable fortress. The loss of star striker Erwin Hoffer to Napoli, and the possible departure of towering forward Stefan Maierhofer, have certainly troubled coach Peter Pacult, but youngsters Christopher Drazan and Christopher Trimmel seem capable of filling the gap.

THE COACH

Peter Pacult is a controversial figure who is not loved by the fans. A pupil of the great Ernst Happel, he joined Rapid in 2006 after gaining experience in the German Bundesliga with Munich 1860.

KEY PLAYER

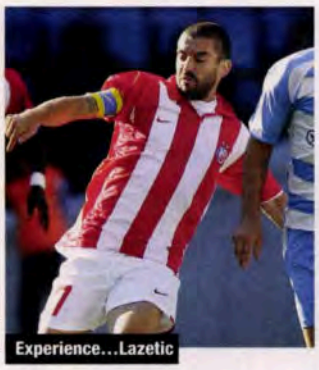
German-born Steffen Hofmann is Rapid's playmaker and most attacks are launched by him.

Rapid Wien 2009-10

As a former striker, Pacult is a coach with natural attacking instincts and he could set up his side in a 4-3-3 formation, which relies on defensive midfielders Markus Heikkinen and Yasin Pelivan to protect the back four.

RED STAR BELGRADE (SER)

AFTER the disaster of last season, struggling Red Star have embarked on a fresh start, with a new chairman, a new sports director, a new head coach and a new, young team. The financial situation is still shaky, so it's no wonder there were no big


Experience...Lazetic

summer signings. Their strengths are the hunger for success of their young players and an effective game-plan based on wingers – in their 5-2 victory over Dinamo Tbilisi, they scored four goals from crosses. Weaknesses are a lack of international experience and the fact that, at least for the time being, there is no left-footed player in midfield or attack.

THE COACH

Vladimir Petrovic ("Pizon") is in his second stint as Red Star coach. He has also coached China's national team.

KEY PLAYER

Attacking midfielder Nikola Lazetic is the club's most experienced player, having spent time at Fenerbahce and several Italian clubs.

Red Star Belgrade 2009-10

Lazetic and Slavko Perovic are good technicians and can set up goals. Perovic can also play as a striker. New signing Dejan Lekic (who arrived from third-tier side FK Zemun) scored a hat-trick against Dinamo Tbilisi.

ROMA (ITA)

SERIOUS financial problems, caused by the Sensi family's debts, make Roma a difficult club to predict this season. With the club and all its players – bar Francesco Totti and Daniele De Rossi – up for sale, anything could happen in 2009-10. At least coach Luciano Spalletti stayed on this summer, though the loss of midfielder Alberto Aquilani to Liverpool was a blow and uncertainty surrounds the fiuture of Montenegro striker

Remaining at Roma...Totti

Mirko Vucinic. Roma began their European campaign in style, hammering Belgian side Gent 10-2 on aggregate in the third qualifying round.

THE COACH

Luciano Spalletti is the longest-serving coach in Serie A, having been at Roma since the summer of 2005.

KEY PLAYER

Francesco Totti remains the club's talisman, but he turns 33 in September and they cannot rely on him forever.

Roma 2009-10

Roma are likely to play a 4-2-3-1, with Totti as the central striker and attacking support provided by Jeremy Menez and new signing Stefano Guberti. Vucinic also offers Spalletti the option of switching to a 4-4-2.

ST PATRICK'S ATHLETIC (IRE)

Danger on the right...Guy

ONLY three St Pat's fans travelled to Samara in eastern Russia for the tie against Krylya Sovetov – but that's three more than were allowed to see the first leg in Bucharest, as Steaua were forced to play the game behind closed doors due to a two-match ban for crowd trouble. In the close season Pat's sold Keith Fahey to Birmingham and then lost striker Mark Quigley with an injury. Last season they were runners-up to Bohemians but they are struggling in the league this time around. The home leg against Steaua was due to be played at the RDS Arena, where they put up a great performance against Hertha Berlin last season.

THE COACH

Ex-Blackburn defender Jeff Kenna joined Pat's from Galway in January.

KEY PLAYER

Declan "Fabio" O'Brien was signed on loan from Dundalk in June and has scored in all four Europa League games so far this season.

St Patrick's Athletic 2009-10

In away games Pat's tend to use Glen Fitzpatrick as a lone target man, but they can also move defender Jamie Harris up front if needed. American Ryan Guy, who plays wide on the right, is key when the team are going forward.

EUROPA LEAGUE

SARAJEVO (BOS)

HAVING experienced some hard times last season, things improved for Sarajevo with the arrival of coach Mehmed Janjos who steered the team to third place in the Bosnian championship and clinched a place in the second qualifying round of the Europa League. Victories over Spartak Trnava and Helsingborgs set up a difficult encounter with 2008 Romanian champions CFR Cluj. Nevertheless, *Horde Zla* (the

Powering ahead...Sarajevo

Hordes of Evil) as Sarajevo fans are known, were confident that their team could defy the odds and reach the group stages.

THE COACH

Mehmed Janjos demands complete discipline and wants players who are "prepared to die" on the pitch.

KEY PLAYER

Winger Damir Hadzic has ability, is hard-working and carries a goal threat.

Sarajevo 2009-10

Sarajevo are a classic 4-4-1-1 counter-attacking side. Sedin Torlak and Ajdin Maksumic are a strong partnership at the back, while lone forward Alen Avdic is backed by the more defence-minded Denaldin Hamzagic.

SHAKHTAR DONETSK (UKR)

THE last-ever UEFA Cup winners shocked their supporters by losing on away goals in the third qualifying round of this season's Champions League to modest Romanian side Timisoara. The defeat was the most serious setback in Shakhtar's recent history and was compounded by the suspected heart attack

Scrapper...Fernandinho

suffered by Romanian coach Mircea Lucescu at the club's summer training camp in Switzerland. For once, Shakhtar sold more players than they signed this summer. Among the most notable departees were Marcelo Moreno, Nery Castillo and Eugen Seleznev.

THE COACH

Wily 64-year-old Mircea Lucescu was hospitalised following his suspected heart attack and missed the start of the Ukrainian championship.

KEY PLAYER

Croatia skipper Darijo Srna withstood the temptation to move after victory in the UEFA Cup last season.

Shakhtar Donetsk 2009-10

The quality of Shakhtar's game depends on their Brazilian legion. Fernandinho is their battling ball winner, Judson and Luiz Adriano the danger up front, while the flanks belong to Ilsinho and the aggressive Willian.

SIGMA OLOMOUC (CZE)

BASED in the historic cathedral city of Olomouc, Sigma have long been one of Czech football's stronger clubs, largely thanks to an extensive youth system. Under unheralded coach Zdenek Psotka, they surpassed expectations by finishing fourth in the league last season and qualifying for Europe. Despite loaning Brazilian playmaker Melinho to German side Koblenz, Sigma crushed Aberdeen 8-1 on aggregate in the third qualifying round. Talented

Useful addition...Otepka

forward Michal Hubnik could also leave before the transfer window closes, but experienced creative midfielder Rudolf Otepka has proved to be a useful addition to the squad.

THE COACH

Zdenek Psotka brings continuity to the role, having been part of the club's coaching set-up since 1998.

KEY PLAYER

Daniel Rossi has been described by the club chairman, Jiri Kubicek, as the best full-back in the Czech league.

Sigma Olomouc 2009-10

Sigma normally opt for 4-4-2 in domestic competition, but are more likely to go 4-2-3-1 in Europe, with 19-year-old Jakub Petr playing as a lone striker. Teenage Brazilian defender Daniel Rossi likes to get forward.

SION (SWI)

Explosive, or dud?...Mpenza

THE Swiss Cup holders are well known for their inconsistency – and also for having the highest turnover of coaches in the country, thanks to their tempestuous and trigger-happy president, Christian Constantin. They have not had much luck in bringing in new players of late, either, and they got themselves into a legal tangle over the signing of Egypt goalkeeper Essam Al Hadari, with the case currently with the Court of Arbitration for Sport. This summer they have gambled on Belgium striker Emile Mpenza, who appropriately enough has been spectacularly inconsistent, as their front man. He arrives from Plymouth Argyle.

THE COACH

Didier Tholot, who was previously player-coach at the club, returned for a new stint in April.

KEY PLAYER

Emile Mpenza is an inconsistent but occasionally explosive striker.

Sion 2009-10

Tholot's team switch between 4-2-3-1 and 4-4-2. The usual defence includes a Latvian (Andris Vanins), two Moroccans (Tariq Chihab and Jamal Aloui), a Hungarian (Vimos Vanczak) and a Mozambican (Paito).

SIVASSPOR (TUR)

Skipper...Hayrettin Yerlikaya

AFTER a surprise second spot in the Turkish league, Sivasspor had a chance of qualifying for a slice of Champions League action but lost heavily to Anderlecht in the third qualifying round. In their favour, they have the ambition, some talented players and a promising young coach in Bulent Uygun, who deserves most of the credit for the club's recent success. Sivasspor lost a lot of players over the summer and signed around 10 new names so there are some doubts over whether they can maintain the form of last season, especially in defence.

THE COACH

Bulent Uygun turned the newly-promoted team into a force in the Turkish top flight.

KEY PLAYER

German-born Turkey striker Ersen Martin is a physically imposing front man who joined from Recreativo of Spain this summer.

Sivasspor 2009-10

After playing a rigid 4-4-2 system last season, coach Uygun experimented with a more open, attacking formation against Anderlecht...and lost 5-0. If Yildiz does not recover from injury they could struggle for goals.

SLAVIA PRAGUE (CZE)

HAVING sold several key players in January, Slavia almost threw away a seemingly unassailable league lead before clinching their second consecutive title. Unsatisfied with his squad, coach Karel Jarolim went on a spending spree in the summer, bringing

Back...Krajcik

in 13 new players, including former favourites Stanislav Vlcek and Matej Krajcik, and dispensing with club captain Erich Brabec, who was little more than six months into a three-and-a-half-year contract. Perhaps predictably, Slavia have looked unsettled so far this term and they suffered an embarrassing away-goals defeat to Moldova's Sheriff in the Champions League.

THE COACH

Karel Jarolim turned down the national job in an attempt to guide Slavia into the Champions League's group phase.

KEY PLAYER

A prolific provider in his first spell with the club, Matej Krajcik rejoined Slavia from Reggina in pre-season.

Slavia Prague 2009-10

Tunisia's Hocine Ragued is expected to anchor the midfield, filling the role vacated by Mickael Tavares, who joined Hamburg in January. In an alternative 4-5-1 formation, Vlcek would be the most likely lone striker.

SLOVAN BRATISLAVA (SLK)

UNDER new owner Ivan Kmotrik, sleeping Slovak giants Slovan won their first domestic title for a decade in May. However, despite signing key players from 2008 winners Petrzalka, they looked out of their depth in the Champions League, where they were beaten 4-0 on aggregate by Olympiakos. They have started the domestic season well, with four wins and five goals from Pavol Masaryk. A fiery following, with a significant right-wing element, here's

Third time lucky...Slovak (right)

hoping they don't make the wrong headlines in their Europa League fourth qualifying round game against Ajax.

THE COACH

Dusan Uhrin, who took over in May, is best known for leading the Czech Republic to the Final of Euro 96.

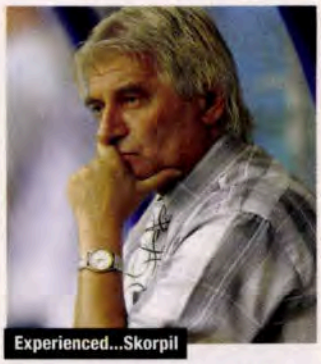
KEY PLAYER

Samuel Slovak is enjoying his third spell at Slovan with telling passes and the odd goal from midfield.

Slovan Bratislava 2009-10

Uhrin's Slovan side incorporate some of the most experienced names from the Slovak game and they are easily capable of dealing with domestic opposition. But they appear too weak at the back for the continental game.

SLOVAN LIBEREC (CZE)


Experienced...Skorpil

ONE of a handful of provincial clubs capable of challenging the dominance of Prague sides Sparta and Slavia, Liberec won the league in 2002 and 2006 and finished third last season. Experienced coach Ladislav Skorpil is anxious to retain the services of Croatian striker Andrej Keric, whose goals were instrumental last term, but he will definitely be without key central defender Pavel Kostal, who joined Austrian side Wiener Neustadt in the summer. Poor form forced Skorpil to drop his first-choice goalkeeper, Zdenek Zlamal, early in the season in favour of 36-year-old veteran Zbynek Hauzr.

THE COACH

Ladislav Skorpil helped guide Slovan to the Czech league title in 2002 and the 64-year-old is now in his second spell at the club.

KEY PLAYER

Croatian striker Andrej Keric was the league's top scorer last season, with 15 goals in 27 appearances.

Slovan Liberec 2009-10

Skorpil usually favours a 4-4-2 formation, but he could easily switch to 4-5-1 in Europe by playing the prolific Keric on the right side of midfield, leaving Jan Nezmar to forage up front in role of lone striker.

EUROPA LEAGUE

SPARTA PRAGUE (CZE)

Shock...defeat by Panathinaikos

FOLLOWING a period of underachievement at the country's most successful club, Jozef Chovanec has been building for the future, bringing in a raft of talented players in their early 20s to play alongside veterans Patrik Berger, Tomas Repka and Jaromir Blazek. The experiment paid off last season, as Chovanec's kids ended the campaign strongly enough to give seemingly uncatchable city rivals Slavia a fright, but the new season has brought mixed results. In the Champions League, a 3-1 win over Panathinaikos was squandered with a 3-0 defeat in the second leg.

THE COACH

Former national coach Jozef Chovanec has stepped down as club president for another spell in the Sparta dugout.

KEY PLAYER

Tomas Repka is now 35, but the combustible central defender's experience and leadership are invaluable to a young Sparta squad.

Sparta Prague 2009-10

There is a lot of experience in the spine at Sparta. Lubos Husek could fill the midfield holding role if necessary, with Berger directing play in a 4-5-1 with Ivorian forward Bony Wilfried as the likely lone front runner.

STABAEK (NOR)

AFTER a stuttering start to the season, Stabaek rediscovered their league-winning form from last year and showed some of the attacking flair that has become their trademark. Jan Jonsson has replaced Veigar Gunnarsson (to Nancy) and Alanzinho (Trabzonspor) with Japan midfielder Daigo Kobayashi (on loan from Omiya Ardija) and midfielder Espen Hoff (from

On loan...Kobayashi

Lyn), while the elegant Sweden midfielder Pontus Farnerud has continued to blossom. Stabaek's new indoor stadium, Telenor Arena, has been a huge success, but the club's lack of depth was apparent as they stumbled out of the Norwegian Cup and the Champions League.

THE COACH

Jan Jonsson joined Stabaek in 2005 and is the longest-serving coach in the league. He has also coached in Japan.

KEY PLAYER

National team keeper Jan Knudsen is a reliable, no fuss No1.

Stabaek 2009-10

Stabaek play a quick, attacking game, in which the wide players are vital in a 4-3-3. Farnerud and Kobayashi strike from midfield, while Daniel Nannskog and young hopeful Mikkel Diskerud are efficient goalscorers.

STEAUA BUCHAREST (ROM)

Challenging...Steaua's Stancu

EUROPEAN champions in 1986, Steaua are forever dreaming of recapturing those glory days. But after reaching the Champions League group stage for three years in a row, they now find themselves in the Europa League. "I'll build a new Steaua, with exclusively Romanian players, like in 1986," says nostalgic owner Gigi Becali, who claimed the appointment of coach Cristiano Bergodi was "Steaua's best transfer of the summer". The Italian brought in Polish forward Rafal Grzelak from Greek side Skoda Xanthi and Cristian Tanase from Arges Pitesti.

THE COACH

Cristiano Bergodi was appointed in June and has done a good job so far in changing Steaua's style into a more effective and spectacular one, contrary to the elaborate game imposed by his predecessors Walter Zenga, Gheorghe Hagi and Marius Lacatus.

KEY PLAYER

Cristian Tanase is a 22-year-old midfielder of genuine talent.

Steaua Bucharest 2009-10

With a classic 4-4-2 that can easily switch to a 3-4-3, Steaua like to play at pace. They faced St Patrick's in the final qualifying round – the Irish club's forceful style will have suited Steaua's counter-attacking style.

STURM GRAZ (AUT)

WIDELY regarded as the best technical and attacking side in the country, Sturm are in fine form again this season and were the early leaders in the Austrian league. In Europe, they had no trouble accounting for Bosnian club Siroki Brijeg in the Europa League second qualifying round before cruising past Petrovac of Montenegro 7-1 on aggregate in the third. However, while their rather young squad is packed with agile and pacy players,

Sturm...love to attack

the team is inexperienced at European level and could struggle as a result. They are dangerous from the wings, through Andreas Holzl and Jakob Jantscher, while Daniel Beichler and Dominic Hassler have weighed in with important goals already this season.

THE COACH

Former Graz sweeper Franco Foda took over from Ivica Osim in 2006.

KEY PLAYER

At 34, captain Mario Haas still has much of his speed and scoring power.

Sturm Graz 2009-10

According to coach Foda, Sturm are at their best when attacking. Therefore the German likes to play 4-3-3 or 4-4-2, with great emphasis on crosses from the wings. Sub Dominic Hassler is an impact player from the bench.

TEPLICE (CZE)

Veteran...Vachousek

WINNING the Czech Cup helped to make up for a disappointing seventh-place league finish for the *Sklari* (Glassmakers), who are one of the country's bigger clubs. The owners briefly put the north Bohemia side up for sale over the summer, describing it as costly to run, and coach Jiri Plisek's activities in the transfer market have been limited. But with a strong, settled team playing in one of the Czech Republic's best stadiums, Teplice should still prove solid opposition. It was the success of striker Edin Dzeko during his time at Teplice that has encouraged the club to invest in several other Bosnian imports.

THE COACH

Jiri Plisek took charge at Teplice in July 2008, aged 36, when Petr Rada was appointed national coach.

KEY PLAYER

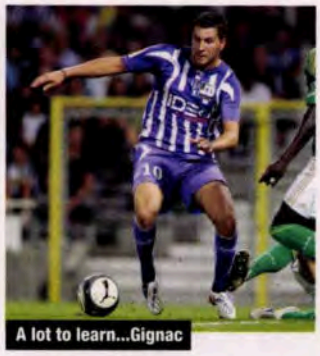
Stepan Vachousek played for Marseille, Austria Wien and the Czech national team earlier in his career.

Teplice 2009-10

Teplice were typically solid in defence last season and conceded just six goals in 15 league games at home. However, it was scoring that proved the problem and they often lacked a cutting edge up front.

TOULOUSE (FRA)

AFTER just avoiding relegation in 2008 Toulouse underwent a remarkable transformation last season and finished in an impressive fourth place in Ligue 1. The question now is whether a young, talented and enthusiastic side can fight effectively on


A lot to learn...Gignac

two fronts. Toulouse have lost one of their most experienced heads, defender Jeremy Mathieu to Valencia, and that may weigh against them. But playing without inhibition can sometimes work in a team's favour and the club have already stated their intention of going for it in Europe, saying all the hard work of the last campaign would be wasted otherwise.

THE COACH

Alain Casanova has painstakingly built a young, hard-working team that should improve with experience.

KEY PLAYER

Andre-Pierre Gignac was last season's leading marksman in France, but has a lot to learn to be ranked with the very best.

Toulouse 2009-10

You won't see any major tactical surprises in Europe from a French side who will almost certainly rely on a tried-and-trusted 4-5-1 formation that mutates into a 4-3-3 when they have the ball.

TRABZONSPOR (TUR)

CLUB owner Sadri Sener spent more than £20million in pursuit of a European place last season, but with that goal now achieved, maintaining success this term will be much harder. New coach Hugo Broos is the man entrusted with the tasking of bringing success back to the Huseyin Avni Aker stadium, where the fans watched an exciting team win six league titles between 1976 and 1984. Summer signings such as Razundara Tjizuku from Istanbul BB and Drago Gabric from Hajduk Split may not have been the big names that some

Winning start...at Sivasspor

supporters had hoped for, but Broos made an impressive start to the league campaign, winning away at Sivasspor on the first day of the new season.

THE COACH

Belgian boss Hugo Broos arrived in July 2009 and immediately struck up a close bond with the players.

KEY PLAYER

Guinea's Ibrahim Yattara has pace and dribbling ability.

Trabzonspor 2009-10

Umut Bulut operates as the lone striker. They have a strong midfield in which Gustavo Colman and Selcuk Inan provide the muscle, with Yattara and Alanzinho giving plenty of width on the flanks.

TROMSO (NOR)

FINISHED third last season and have refound their pre-season form after a disappointing start to the current league season. The team is a well-balanced mixture of experience and young talent, relying on a strong central line. Morten Moldskred and Sigurd

Midfield strength...Knarvik

Rushfeldt score most of Tromso's goals, and they are supported by Tommy Knarvik from midfield. They are a hard-working team in which goalkeeper Sead Ramovic, along with central defenders Miika Koppinen and Tore Reginiussen, take defensive responsibility, while Ruben Yttergard Jenssen is a promising young talent.

THE COACH

Per Hogmo took over from Steinar Nilsen (now Brann) after last season. He is a former coach of Rosenborg and the national women's team.

KEY PLAYER

Tore Reginiussen is a 23-year old international who is strong in the air and expected to move abroad soon.

Tromso 2009-10

A well-drilled 4-4-2 with Moldskred and Rushfeldt fed from midfielders Lars Iver Strand and Jenssen. Uncompromising defenders Koppinen and Tore Reginiussen marshal the defence and Ramovic excels in goal.

EUROPA LEAGUE

TWENTE ENSCHEDE (HOL)

Back on track...McClaren

WITH a highly professional coach and organisation, an expanded stadium and a team that is playing the best football in Holland, Twente will be a force to be reckoned with in future years. However, they still have to clear that final hurdle and win things after finishing runners-up in the league and in the Dutch Cup. They must also improve in Europe, where last year Arsenal proved to be too strong in the Champions League. They were eliminated this season by an injury-time equaliser at home to Sporting Lisbon.

THE COACH

Former England manager Steve McClaren is getting his career back on track in Enschede. Regarded as an expert in Holland for stirring up Twente to some magnificent results and performances.

KEY PLAYER

Bryan Ruiz will be used as a left winger by McClaren, with the freedom to create his own chances.

Twente 2009-10

Midfielder Cheik Tiote is an extra option to play more defensively in Europe, while Miroslav Stoch is an alternative for Bernard Parker. Left-back is a weakness, Slobodan Rajkovic is actually a right-footed central defender.

VALENCIA (SPA)

THE anticipated exodus of players has yet to happen, with even David Villa and David Silva, Valencia's two most coveted stars,

Hanging around...Villa

still at the club with the closure of the transfer window fast approaching. With new financial backers attempting to keep the club on the straight and narrow, only central defender Raul Albiol (to Real Madrid) has departed so far, leaving a similar squad to last season. On paper, they look good prospects for an extended run in this season's Europa League, but, as ever with Valencia, nothing is straightforward – and with the club's remarkable capacity for self-destruction it makes accurate predictions difficult.

THE COACH

Unai Emery is one of Spain's brightest young managers, having suceeded Ronald Koeman in summer 2008.

KEY PLAYER

Despite the continuing disquiet over his future at Valencia, David Villa remains a supreme finisher.

Valencia 2009-10

Valencia generally favour an attacking 4-3-3 formation, with David Silva dropping in behind Villa and two side men. As and when a more defensive fomation is required, it can be easily switched to a 4-2-3-1.

VASLUI (ROM)

CLUB owner Adrian Porumboiu, a former FIFA referee turned agriculture businessman, has offered solid financial support to enable the club to bring in some good players after several poor experiences. "We are happy to meet AEK Athens to prove our progress," said an optimistic Porumboiu. "We deserve a place in the Europa League group." Coach Cristian Dulca has put

Progress...high hopes at Vaslui

together a cosmopolitan side, with seven foreigners in his first XI, but his greatest problem would appear to be the small number of spectators who turn up to watch his side.

THE COACH

Cristian Dulca is just 36 years old and in his first coaching job, but he proved he is a strong character by beating cancer two years ago.

KEY PLAYER

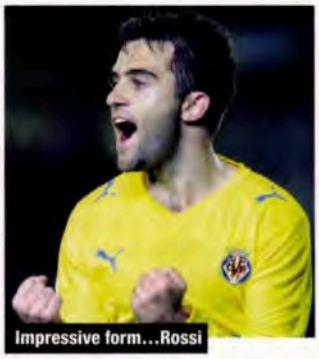
Brazilian forward Wesley was one of the most influential players in the Portuguese league before leaving Leixoes for Vaslui in January.

Vaslui 2009-10

Bulgarian midfielder Stanislav Genchev, Serbs Milos Pavlovic and Nemanja Jovanovic, Brazil's Wesley, Zimbabwe's Mike Temanjera and Romanian Lucian Burdujan all like to try their luck from distance.

VILLARREAL (SPA)

LEARNING to live without Manuel Pellegrini, their long-serving coach who joined Real Madrid this summer, Villarreal are now in the hands of Ernesto Valverde, who is back in Spain after winning the Greek title


Impressive form...Rossi

with Olympiakos last season. He previously steered Espanyol to the 2007 UEFA Cup Final. The club, from a small town with a population of 48,000, continue to punch above their weight, relying heavily on South American talent and the odd European veteran such as Robert Pires. After reaching last season's Champions League quarter-final, Villarreal will be confident of a decent run in the Europa League.

THE COACH

Ernesto Valverde is a widely respected figure in Spain after his work with Athletic Bilbao and Espanyol.

KEY PLAYER

US-born former Manchester United striker Giuseppe Rossi impressed for Italy at the Confederations Cup.

Villarreal 2009-10

With Marcos Senna and Sebastian Eguren both defensive-minded midfielders, the flair in Villarreal's 4-4-2 formation comes from the likes of Ruben Cani and the experienced Pires on the flanks.

VORSKLA POLTAVA (UKR)

Getting to grips...Despotovski

BASED in the city of Poltava, located in the centre of the country, Vorskla shocked even their own fans by winning the Ukrainian Cup for the first time last season. The club's destiny changed drastically – from the constant threat of relegation to being one of the country's strongest outfits – after the arrival of industrial billionaire Kostyantin Zhevago as owner in April 2005. Since then, a transfer policy based on the purchase of promising players from the Balkans has produced impressive results. The best business of the summer was to get Albania defenders Armend Dallku and Debatik Curri to resist the temptation of lucrative offers from Bundesliga clubs.

THE COACH

Mykola Pavlov steered Dynamo Kyiv to the league title in 1995 and Vorskla to the Ukrainian Cup last season.

KEY PLAYER

Jovan Markoski was signed in 2006 from Zeta. He has three caps for Serbia and dictates the pace of the game.

Vorskla Poltava 2009-10

Pavlov's team is based on a solid defence, built around Dallku and Ukraine Under-21 Volodymyr Chesnakov. Macedonia's Filip Despotovski is irreplaceable in the holding position, while Markoski orchestrates it all.

WERDER BREMEN (GER)

LAST season's German Cup winners and UEFA Cup runners-up find themselves at a crossroads, forced to seriously rethink after a poor Bundesliga campaign, the departure of brilliant Brazilian playmaker Diego and the retirement of

Falling into place...Ozil

the talismanic Frank Baumann. New arrivals include tricky ex-Gladbach winger Marko Marin, Bolivian striker Marcelo Moreno (on loan from Shakhtar Donetsk) and midfield all-rounder Tim Borowski, back after a year on the bench at Bayern Munich.

THE COACH

Is the pressure beginning to tell on long-serving boss Thomas Schaaf, who recently went on TV to complain about the lack of reinforcements?

KEY PLAYER

In a summer poll, a majority of fans thought the German-Turkish ball artist Mesut Ozil would not be able to fill the departed Diego's shoes. They do him an injustice.

Werder Bremen 2009-10

Revolution is in the air. With Diego no longer around, Schaaf could ditch his beloved midfield diamond for a system where the creative impulses come from young German internationals Marin and Ozil on the flanks.

ZENIT ST PETERSBURG (RUS)

AFTER the highs of winning the UEFA Cup and European Super Cup in 2008, Zenit could only finish a disappointing fifth in

Driving force...Zyryanov

the Russian League last season. Since then they have also lost key players such as Andrei Arshavin (to Arsenal), Anatoliy Timoshchuk (Bayern Munich) and Pavel Pogrebnyak (Stuttgart), while Portuguese star Danny is sidelined with a serious injury. With the 2009 season proving to be equally disappointing, Dutch coach Dick Advocaat was sacked. So Russia's richest club, with an annual budget of almost £60million, now face a spell of rebuilding under a yet-to-be announced new coach.

THE COACH

Reserve team boss Anatoli Davydov took charge of Zenit on a temporary basis following the sacking of Dick Advocaat in August.

KEY PLAYER

Konstantin Zyryanov, one of Russia's Euro 2008 stars, is a playmaker who also scores goals.

Zenit St Petersburg 2009-10

The Russian national team trio of Igor Semshov, Igor Denisov and Zyryanov leave their opponents little chance in midfield, but the lack of a high-class striker – especially with no Pogrebnyak or Danny – is a problem.

ZILINA (SLK)

Essential...Jez

SLOVAKIAN champions four times in the last eight years, Zilina are the country's most consistent club since independence in 1993 and are no strangers to Europe. While a win at Aston Villa was a mere consolation at the end of last season's UEFA Cup group stage, a recent 1-0 victory at Hajduk Split, courtesy of a late goal by Ivan Lietava, put this provincial outfit within two games of another try. Czech coach Pavel Hapal will have prepared his side well for the vital clash with Partizan Belgrade, though fans are constantly on their guard for rash decisions by the club.

THE COACH

Former Czech Republic boss Pavel Hapal was installed in May 2009 after stints at several clubs in his homeland and Slovakia.

KEY PLAYER

Midfielder Robert Jez was an essential part of Zilina's free-scoring, league title-winning side of 2007.

Zilina 2009-10

Zilina have earned a reputation as a high-scoring, attacking side who are as likely to win games away from home as they are at their Pod Dubnam stadium. Their normal 4-4-2 generally switches to a 4-1-4-1 when playing away.

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Tim Vickery picks the outstanding performers from the 2009 Libertadores Cup

LIBERTADORES

Mariano ANDUJAR
ESTUDIANTES (Arg)

THE Argentinian side claimed their fourth Libertadores title with a run of 11 unbeaten games, during which time keeper Andujar picked the ball out of his net just twice. Of those two goals, the one he conceded against Cruzeiro in the Final took an unstoppable deflection, while up until Alexander Medina's strike for Nacional of Uruguay in the second leg of the semi-final he had kept a clean sheet for nearly 800 minutes.

"He was a human wall," said Argentina's 1978 World Cup-winning goalkeeper, Ubaldo Fillol. "The best keeper in Argentina, the best in the Libertadores and up there with the best in the world today."

While Andujar himself was quick to point out Estudiantes' magnificent defensive record was a collective effort, his own performances – which were safe and solid, rather than spectacular – saw him make his debut for Argentina, in a World Cup qualifier against Colombia, in June.

He started with Huracan in Buenos Aires and had a loan spell with Palermo before moving back across the Atlantic to sign for Estudiantes in 2006. However, now 26, he is off to try his luck in Italy again, having signed for Catania during the summer.

FABIO
CRUZEIRO (Bra)

ONE of the few Cruzeiro players to reach anything close to their potential in the Final, he was not at fault for the two goals conceded in the second leg and was the chief reason why the first leg ended goalless, denying Estudiantes on five occasions.

This was the campaign when Fabio demonstrated that his career is back on track. When he took over from Helton in the Vasco da Gama goal he looked the most promising of all of Brazil's keepers, possessing technique and athleticism. He was taken to the 2003 Confederations Cup for experience, and single-handedly saved Vasco from relegation, but he then fought a judicial battle with the club and was forced out of action until he joined Cruzeiro in 2005.

It seemed to take the edge off his game and he also confessed to an attitude problem.

"I thought I was the best and didn't need to make an effort to be above average," he says. "I thought I could save everything, but the easy balls ended up being the most difficult."

A lay-off with a knee injury gave him the opportunity to improve his mental approach and, 29 in September, there is still plenty of time for him to achieve all the things that lie within his elastic grasp.

KLEBER
CRUZEIRO (Bra)

"IT'S going to take me a long time to recover from this," said Kleber after Cruzeiro's defeat in the Final. His glaring miss – when faced with an open goal at the end of the goalless first leg – may have proved expensive, but there is still much from the tournament that he can look back on with pride.

Known as "the gladiator", the 26-year-old was the outstanding individual attacking talent on show.

After coming through the ranks at Sao Paulo, he helped Brazil win the 2003 World Youth Championship before joining Dynamo Kyiv. Last year he was loaned to Palmeiras and then signed for Cruzeiro as part of the deal that took Guilherme to Ukraine.

Kleber's Libertadores debut was electric: off the bench when the group game against Estudiantes was goalless, he scored twice and got sent off inside 15 minutes. Another red card came his way in his next outing and by this time his short fuse was public knowledge. For the rest of the competition he was baited and provoked, but he managed to keep his cool.

Stocky and strong, superb on the turn, and skilful in his use of the flanks, he scored four times and set up vital goals for centre-forward Wellington Paulista.

STARS

SIX OF THE BEST

Nicolas LODEIRO
NACIONAL (Uru)

PICKED out by *World Soccer* earlier this year as one of the most impressive players at the South American Under-20 Championship, just four days after the competition finished he came off the substitutes' bench in Nacional's Libertadores opener against Universidad SMP of Peru to head home the winner in injury time.

Short and stocky, it was with the ball at his feet that this creative talent most helped his side become the first Uruguayan club to reach the Libertadores semi-finals for 20 years. He scored four times in the group phase, but the 20-year-old's true value lies more in his ability to set up the play. He keeps the game flowing because he appears to have the priceless gift of knowing what to do with the ball before it arrives.

He seemed to tire in the knockout games, which was hardly surprising after such a gruelling few months, but with Nacional in trouble in the second leg of their semi-final he came off the bench at half-time and instantly generated ideas, setting up the first goal Estudiantes had conceded in almost 13 hours with a clever lob.

Without a doubt, he is South America's outstanding revelation of 2009.

Enzo PEREZ
ESTUDIANTES (Arg)

WITHOUT his goal in the first game of the campaign, the eventual winners might not even have reached the group phase. A powerful run down the left and a shot which squeezed through a goalkeeper who had been expecting a cross, his was the vital away goal against Peru's Sporting Cristal that took his side through the qualifying round.

However, most of Perez's best work is usually done on the right flank, where his driving runs, neat control and quick, low crosses set up a stream of chances for his side's strikers.

He helped ensure that the reign of coach Alejandro Sabella got off to a flying start: after three minutes of Sabella's first match, against Deportivo Quito, Perez cut in and combined with Juan Sebastian Veron to give Mauro Boselli – the tournament's top scorer – an easy headed goal. Perez later scurried away to score the third in a 4-0 win; a result that gave the team a much-needed surge of confidence that took them all the way to the title.

Signed two years ago from Godoy Cruz of Mendoza, the 23-year-old was the youngest in the Estudiantes starting line-up and over the two legs of the Final he had a claim to be considered their most effective player.

SOUZA
GREMIO (Bra)

THE Peruvian press described the 30-year-old as being like something out of PlayStation when he crashed in a shot with his "other" foot – his left – against San Martin in their round-of-16 clash.

The attacking midfielder strikes the ball wonderfully well and contributed six of his specials to his side's Libertadores campaign. But had he really been programmed by a computer then his career path could well have been smoother.

Something of a late developer, he found it difficult to cope with the demands and the rewards of the professional game until finally settling down during an excellent four-year spell with Sao Paulo around the middle of the decade.

A move to Paris Saint-Germain was probably a case of the wrong man, wrong club, wrong time and he made little impression in France before joining Gremio on loan.

Spectacular long-range shooting made him the club's top scorer in their run to the last four of this year's Libertadores tournament and it was those stunning strikes that convinced Gremio to sign him on a permanent basis.

FACE TO FACE

Interviews with football's biggest names

Hoddle

"I always wondered what would have happened to these youngsters had they been allowed to develop...now we are changing their lives"

GLENN HODDLE

A second **chance**

The Glenn Hoddle Academy was opened in Jerez, southern Spain, last year with the aim of helping young players who have been released by clubs to get back into the professional game. Here, the former England manager outlines his hopes and future plans for his project

How is the Glenn Hoddle Academy going?
It's going very well. It has been a journey. We've had a year at it, there's been some good work put in and now we're just starting to see the fruits of what is really a development centre for professionals who have been released from clubs. And yes, we're starting to get players back into the game. We got Chris Fagan back into Lincoln. We've got Ikechi Anya, who has signed for Sevilla – which is an unbelievable story. From amateur football to Sevilla is just what this academy concept is all about. I'm delighted with the way things are unfolding.

What made you set up the academy?
I noticed when I first became a manager that every year I was repeating myself in releasing young talent and I always felt that it was far too young. You wondered what was going to happen to these players if we held on to them for another year, but at certain clubs you can't do that. You can't wait, you can't let them develop because of the finances, or because you've got five others that are better at that time. But then I looked at some of those that you do take and, in the end, after two years they would drift out of the game too. I kept thinking what would have happened to some of these boys if they had been allowed to develop. And, let's face it, at 18, 19, even 20, you're underdeveloped and you're playing probably too many matches. That was when I said, right, one day I would like to do something about this. It was a seed that was in the back of my mind and then I just felt the time was right for me.

Are foreigners blocking the path of talented youngsters in England?
Definitely. When I was an apprentice at Tottenham, a foreigner coming in as a youth team player would never be known. In the two years I was an apprentice there might have been one, but it was so unusual. Ossie [Ardiles] and Ricky [Villa] came into the first team, and that was massive news, but the thought of bringing a 17-year-old into a club was non-existent. Now academies are full of foreign players because of the money in England. You've got to be a Rooney, Owen, Ferdinand or Walcott to be fast-tracked into the first-team squad. And this is why there is going to be more fallout. It's sad for English football. I think we are an answer to that. Or maybe not an answer, but an opportunity.

Is the England team suffering as a result?
It will do. I think there's a real danger. I said it three years ago when I was Wolves manager. The FA have really got to look at this. They're not going to be able to stop foreign players coming in, so they've got to find a way to develop young English players for international football. How are you going to do that? That's the challenge. We've been hearing that for 30 years and we still haven't found the answer. But I think with what's happening we have to find a solution. We're running out of goalkeepers; let's use that as an example. We had the best goalkeepers in the world for decades. Where are the English goalkeepers going to come from now?

At the moment it's mainly English players at the academy. Will that change?
Yes, it's going to be opened up. We've got Spanish and Italian players coming, we'll have Brazilians and Africans, so it is worldwide. But we knew we had to take some time. The first batch of players were from the UK and we're now getting them back into football. That's the dream, we're changing their lives.

How did Ikechi's move to Sevilla come about?
He played for the academy against Sevilla's reserve team. Ikechi tore them apart and they asked him down for a trial. I took him there myself and, apart from their first-team player [Argentinian Federico Fazio], who was coming back from injury, he was a cut above. They can see his potential. The football will suit him better in Spain than England. It's a wonderful story for us. It puts us on the map.

Will the concept change in the future?
It could well do. For us to survive, maybe someone will want to invest in a club and then we become that club. It's a vehicle to place those players through, but we would still be in control of the development. There are opportunities happening. The Middle East is perhaps interested in improving its international youngsters by coming here, taking places with us as well.

Have the FA offered any backing?
I spoke to the Premier League, the Football League and the PFA. Because we're a commercial academy they can't help us. We have to respect that, but it's pretty sad that they can't see what we're doing. But that's life, we'll get on with it. We're in control of our own destiny but it's going to make it hard, so we've got to try to survive over the next three or four years.

Do you plan academies in other countries?
Possibly, yes, but one step at a time. I would love to have this in three different countries, with maybe one back in England. The climate is the problem, but you can rotate. But we haven't got that funding. We are not a club with revenue from gates every week. We're in that awkward position of any business, or any concept, one year down the road – but we're progressing. We're on the right road and if we get the right investment – again, sponsorship – then we'll be all right.

How rewarding is all this?
I wouldn't have said this years ago but I would get as much pleasure, if not more, than winning the Premier League or the FA Cup as a manager, to see these lads playing. It's a massive thing. You're changing their lives, you're changing their brothers' lives, you're changing their mums' and dads' lives, their friends' lives. It's a wonderful, wonderful thing and someone out there might just see that and say this might be a good thing to do.

Could you combine this with a management job in the future?
Perhaps. I've turned down 15 offers since I've been here. I'd never say never. I've not done this because I'm disillusioned with management. After Wolves it was my time. The template needs to be there. We need to be able to create it, take it on, but if once we get it going, in two, three years' time, I might say yes to an international job. Without a doubt it could be done at some stage. But club management, no. I'd have to stop this and at the moment I don't feel like stopping it.

Interview by Ben Hayward

PETER REID

Thais are **insular** too

Thailand's coach on the struggle to change hearts and minds

● You've been in Thailand for nearly a year now. What's your impression of the footballing landscape?
There's massive potential with the technical ability of the players. I'm not sure, tactically, that they always get what we're doing, but they have improved massively in the one season.

What's the reason behind that?
The clubs have got stronger, they have realised that they need to be professional and are doing things like starting on time. That might sound ridiculous, but it's the case. Some of the games I've seen have been really entertaining. The attendances in the league are going up and that's because of the improved quality on the pitch. We need to build on that.

Your enthusiasm for the job has been one of the most striking features of your time in charge. What do you attribute that to?
You've always got to be enthusiastic. But mentally, being a manager in the Premier League, with the other side [of the job] – the media, the commercial side, the marketing – sometimes you don't have time for the technical side. Here I can get on the pitch and work with the players and I won't have the chairman ringing me up asking, "Are we going for him?" or "Are the players OK for this social event?" or whatever.

How do you feel about the standard of football around the region?
Southeast Asia technically is very good. There's some naive defending and the goalkeepers could improve. We played Saudi Arabia and Jordan, been into Qatar, Japan, Indonesia and Vietnam, and it's great experience. When you are insular you think England is all that happens when you're English. There's a whole football world out there. You look at Australia, South Korea and Japan, they're good football nations with good players. It's fantastic for me and it's fantastic for Thailand because I think we can move up there. We have got the talent; it's now about getting the organisation and the resources and marrying them all together.

How much of a challenge is that?
It is hard. It's not an easy job and if I can improve them and get a team that in four years is close to qualifying for the World Cup finals then that's a tremendous achievement. I think that is possible. The mental side is important too. Some teams go to Old Trafford and they're beaten before they go. It's about getting players mentally strong and it's hard work. That comes with confidence. I firmly believe the technique is there, but that mental strength is what we need. When you are playing in Australia, and it's a partisan crowd, you've got to be strong mentally. World football means the world, it means playing in the cold, the wet and the heat. The Thais, too, are insular but you've got to open yourself up and change that mentality.

> **"We have the talent, it's now about getting the organisation and resources and marrying it all together"**

Was it a difficult decision to leave England and take on this job?
It was a massive decision in terms of it being a different culture, different lifestyle, different football. But you read about Arsene Wenger going to Japan. And why did Wenger go to Japan? It's an education. I'm not comparing Thailand to Japan but I'm hoping I can improve it.

Did you talk to [former Thailand coach] Peter Withe first?
I did. In fact, I spoke to Peter when he was the Thai coach. We met when we were doing our UEFA Pro Licence and I always remember him saying to me the technique is fantastic, some of these boys are incredible and he was spot on. I chatted with him too about

FREDDIE LJUNGBERG

MLS is **better** than you think

● What made you choose MLS?
Last summer I was a free agent for the first time in my life. I had been a top professional since I was 16 and I wanted to try something completely different. I had been hearing lots of positive things about playing in America. There's so much potential here.

Why the Seattle Sounders?
The new franchise sounded like a very exciting project and now I'm here I know everything they told me was true. It's very professional, the management are very serious about developing the club and we have 35,000 at every home game. If they were going to make football work in America, Seattle was the place to be. They have a plan to build the franchise into a club as big as the top European teams.

What are the main differences between MLS and the English Premier League?
It's a whole different game. Here they ask me to do a lot of promotional work to push the sport. Also, I help out with the coaching. They want me to pass on my experience and help out in training with exercises and tactics. They want to be the best they can be. Here in America they don't always play the ball on the floor, so they want me to show my team-mates how the game should be played. The standard is a lot better than people think. The games are really physical and played at a high tempo, but of course when it's extremely hot the games slow down.

the basic structure, so I knew what I was coming into. It's like starting again. Can you do it? Can you go in cold and not know anything about the players in another country? You bring in little things like injury prevention, getting that extra percentage, like not having chilli beef or fizzy drinks before the game. It's been hard because the lads like their food.

What are your more immediate targets?
First and foremost is getting to the Asian Cup [in Qatar in 2011]. We have two games against Singapore home and away, back to back. We drew with Iran and we drew with Jordan. We played against Saudi Arabia recently and they're huge boys. But Lionel Messi's not big, Iniesta's not big, Paul Scholes isn't big. Michael Owen isn't big but he gets headers in the box against the best defenders in the world. If you have the technique and the body strength and a low centre of gravity, I don't care if you're 6ft 8in, if you've got the ball at your feet it's hard to get the ball off you. I understand in football now is all about getting box-to-box and being strong, but nothing moves quicker than the ball and nothing ever will.

Interview by Michael Church

ANATOLIY TYMOSHCHUK

Why I chose the **Bundesliga**

How does it feel to be a Bayern Munich player?
Bayern is a great club with a rich history and big ambitions. Any player would be delighted to come here. I'm no different. They had a disappointing time last season, but we've already won the Audi Cup this summer, which as pre-season tournaments go, is a pretty strong event.

How does the pre-season training regime compare to that at Zenit and Shakhtar?
At Shakhtar the accent during pre-season was always on physical preparations, but at Bayern it's a bit more like what I experienced at Zenit under Dick Advocaat. You can feel the Dutch influence. We've been working with the ball, focusing on technique and tactics, and we've also been playing several games against the fan clubs for charity. It's a very different approach.

Was your move finalised before Louis Van Gaal was appointed? Or did he have the final say?
The negotiations were handled by the Bayern board, by Karl-Heinz Rummenigge, Uli Hoeness and Karl Hofner. Louis Van Gaal was only appointed a month before the start of the season and by that point my transfer had already been finalised.

Why did you opt for Germany? Would it have been more of a test in England, Spain or Italy?
Possibly so but the Bundesliga is highly competitive – the battle for the title last season went down to the final round of games. The infrastructure and the standard of football is top notch. I had offers from England, Spain and Italy, and I could have stayed at Zenit, but Bayern were the first to start negotiations, and they were genuine and clear about their intentions. That impressed me.

You adapted very quickly to Zenit and Russian football, but presumably that was not such a big culture shock...
I still needed time when I moved to Zenit. You still have to sort out all sorts of everyday problems to make sure they don't get in the way of your football. And everyone needs a certain amount of time to adapt. For now, I'm busy learning German and just doing whatever I can to ease the transition.

Interview by Dan Brennan

After seeing the way David Beckham was treated, does that put you off a loan move back to Europe?
I did have a couple of loan offers from Europe to come back this summer, but I told Seattle I will stay this season. For me, it was the right decision because the team is playing really well.

Anything you miss about England?
I like the humour in England. Sometimes I make jokes here and they don't understand. It was nice when the Chelsea boys were over so I could have a laugh and joke with them. I miss a roast chicken dinner on a Sunday. It's so different here – there are no paparazzi. I do get recognised when I walk down the street and I stop for photos and to sign autographs. It's part of the game. Here the fans are more respectful and just want to say hello. My friend is the quarterback of the Seattle Seahawks and we walked into Starbucks together. I thought he was going to get mobbed, but people just looked at him and said hi. They didn't swarm round him.

Can your old club Arsenal maintain their place in the top four?
I'm an Arsenal man. I love the club but it's hard to keep competing at the top if they're selling their best players. Arsene Wenger has a lot of good young players, though, and they have the ability to achieve great things.

Would you consider coming out of retirement for the World Cup?
I have said that if Sweden have lots of injuries I will help them out.

Interview by Ben Welch

THE MEN WHO MATTER

Ahn Young-hak

North Korea's Japan-born midfielder is on a mission to emulate the class of '66.

WHILE NORTH KOREA is undoubtedly the most secretive, self-contained country in the world, it is paradoxical that its national team has its fair share of external influences.

Young talents Pak Chol-ryong and Kim Kuk-jin play in Switzerland with Concordia Basle and FC Wil respectively, schemer Hong Yong-jo is employed by Russian side Rostov, while the Democratic People's Republic side also features a pair of Japan-born Koreans: attacker Jong Tae-se and the wiry, tall midfield enforcer Ahn Young-hak, whose power-packed tackling and boundless stamina formed the steely core of North Korea's qualification for South Africa next year. It will be the communist nation's first World Cup finals since their amazing feats of 1966 in England, when they famously beat Italy in Middlesbrough en route to a brave 5-3 quarter-final defeat by a Eusebio-inspired Portugal.

One of 600,000 Koreans living in Japan – known as Zainichi – Ahn was born and brought up in the Land of the Rising Sun, but was never likely to go down the naturalisation route there. His family, anxious to maintain their language, culture and identity, sent their son to an ethnic Korean school and to this day he remains immensely proud of his North Korean heritage and passport.

Ahn played for North Korea during their unsuccessful 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign and admits that as an outsider he needed a little time to be accepted by his team-mates. Now they form a band of brothers says Ahn, who attributes the team's recent renaissance to this very cohesion and the disciplined, unified way they have responded to coach Kim Jong-hun.

> "North Korea's stinginess at the back owes a great deal to Ahn's full-bloodied efforts and sense of self-sacrifice"

Ahn is not kidding. They are a very hard side to break down and in their final Asian qualifying group they only conceded five goals in eight games, a defensive stinginess which owed a great deal to Ahn's full-blooded efforts and his sense of self-sacrifice.

Surreal state of affairs

When it comes to football, North Korea are not as insular and dogmatic as the "rogue state" manual would seem to suggest. The North do not mind that Ahn has never lived there and turn a blind eye to the fact that he plays his club football for Suwon Bluewings in capitalist South Korea – a surreal state of affairs bearing in mind that the North and South are technically at war and view each other with ill-disguised mutual mistrust.

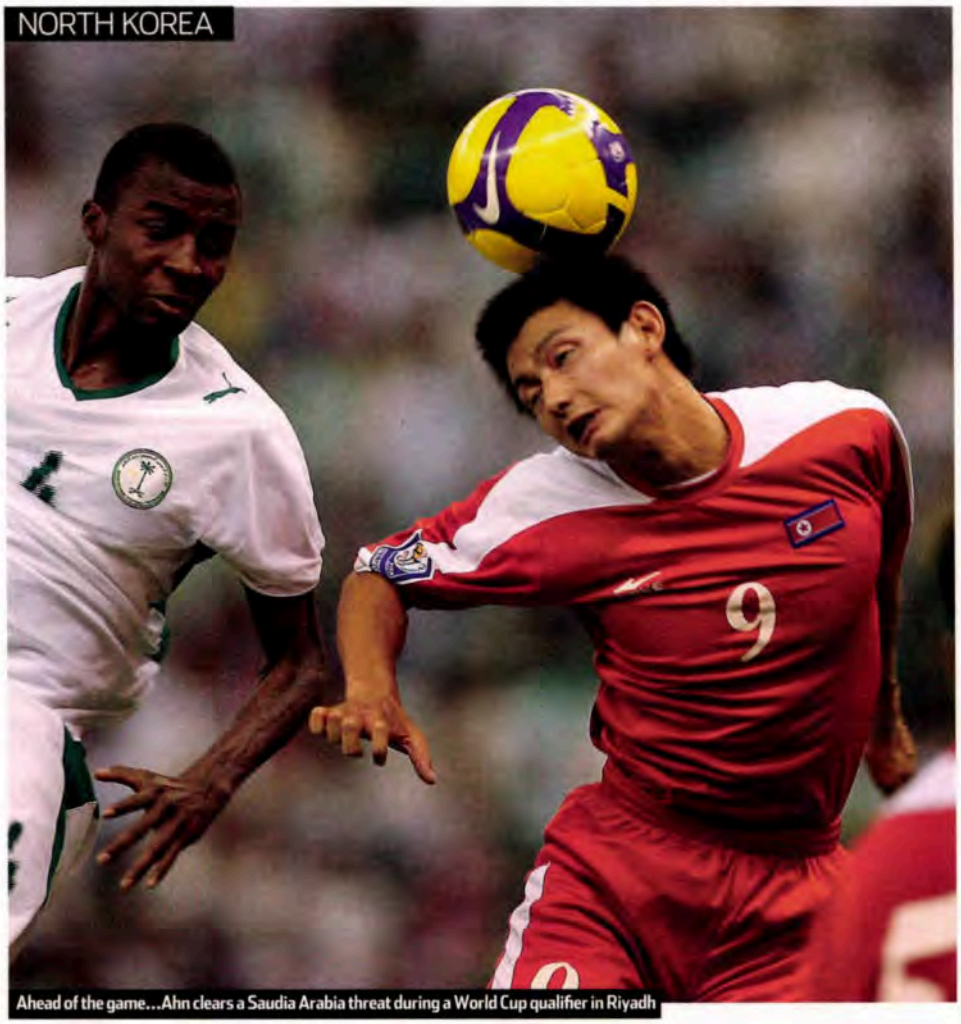
No question of the stakes not being high next summer then, with the two Koreas both having qualified for the finals – where acts of one-upmanship will not just be hoped for by each side; they will be demanded.

Up until now, Ahn's club career has been 100 per cent Asian, starting with Japanese club Albirex Niigata – whom he helped win the second division title in 2003 – then turning out for Nagoya Grampus Eight in the J.League, before moving three years ago to South Korea, where he has worn the colours of Busan I'Park and Bluewings, who he joined in a swap deal involving the one-time superstar of the South, Ahn Jung-hwan, scorer of their winner against Italy at the 2002 World Cup.

North Korea's Ahn says his dream is to play in the English Premier League and no doubt he will be looking to impress would-be buyers in South Africa. However, he can be trusted implicitly not to put his personal ambition above the needs of his team. At such an important tournament, the North's first in 44 years, he knows full well that pulling together will be the only way for them to make the sort of splash they crave: the revival of the spirit of '66.

Nick Bidwell

NORTH KOREA



Ahead of the game...Ahn clears a Saudia Arabia threat during a World Cup qualifier in Riyadh

They shall not pass...Subotic (left), keeping out Sweden's Henrik Larsson in a friendly, looks set to be the regular partner for Vidic at the heart of Serbia's defence

Neven SUBOTIC

Serbia are grateful their new central defender opted for his parents' homeland

> **What I like about Neven is the way he applies himself. His win to win is apparent straight away, he's the total competitor**
>
> *Serbia coach Raddy Antic*

WITH CENTRAL defenders Mladen Krstajic and Ivica Dragutinovic in the final throes of their respective careers, Serbia boss Raddy Antic needed – as a matter of urgency – to identify a new partner for Nemanja Vidic at the heart of his back four. And he looks to have settled on Borussia Dortmund's Neven Subotic, who enjoyed such a fruitful initiation to international football at the tail-end of last season

Given his first cap as a substitute in the 3-2 win in Romania in March, the 20-year-old was in from the start for Serbia's next two qualifiers – at home to Austria and away to Faroe Islands – and went on to cut a most impressive figure as his team consolidated their grip on Group 7 with six more points.

Some Serb pundits initially thought Antic was gambling by placing his faith in someone with so little experience, but they need not have worried.

Calm, confident and extremely talented, Subotic would prove as effective on the international stage as he has been in German club football over the past two years with Mainz and Dortmund. Bundesliga or World Cup, it made no difference. He simply played as he always does: with heart, tenacity, aerial dominance and good technique. Certainly he has more than enough skill not to fall prey to his most significant weakness – overdoing the long punt forward.

As for his patented goal threat, he brought that along with him too, nodding home the second in the 2-0 win in the Faroes. Last season he scored no fewer than six times for Dortmund, regularly showcasing his ability to lose his marker and ferociously attack the high ball.

Tough and resilient

The baby face, long hair, Alice band and frail physique are misleading – Subotic is as tough and resilient as they come. "What I like about Neven is the way he applies himself," says Antic. "His will to win is apparent straight away. He's the total competitor. It's the same in training. He burns with a desire to learn and improve. Some players want to forget their mistakes; he aims to correct them immediately."

Antic can only be grateful Subotic is on his side. After all, he had several citizenship options: his parents' homeland, Serbia; his birthplace, Bosnia; Germany, where he and his family lived for almost a decade in the Black Forest town of Schomberg after fleeing war in the Balkans; and USA, where he lived as a teenager and where his talents were first noticed.

The chances of Subotic opting for Bosnia were always slim. Similarly, he was only ever a refugee in Germany and FIFA quickly ruled against him linking with the *Nationalmannschaft*. But the US football authorities had good reason to believe they had got their man. After all, he was recruited to their national youth programme after USSF coach Keith Fulk spotted him training on his own near his home in Bradenton, Florida, and he starred for the University of South Florida and USA's Under-17s and Under-20s.

"I didn't turn down Bosnia and the USA as much decide for Serbia," says Subotic, who left the States in 2006 when agent Steve Kelly "placed" him at then German second division side Mainz. "I've a Serb background and blood. I didn't look at the strength of the national teams I could play for. This was a decision of the heart."

Nick Bidwell

VENEZUELA

Louis Angelo PENA

Under-20 star hopes to shine in Portugal

ONE OF THE most striking developments in the South American game this year has been Venezuela qualifying for the World Youth Cup for the first time.

While they were not entirely convincing in the South American Under-20 Championship – and may not have made it without home advantage, which in itself was a fluke as internal problems forced the tournament to be switched from Peru at short notice – the prospect of being in Egypt for the finals in September has brought a new momentum to football in the country and hastened a generational change in the senior side.

Over half the Under-20 squad have now played at full level, with six of them pitched into 2010 World Cup qualifiers. Goalkeeper Rafael Romo had an excellent game in the away win against Bolivia, while centre-backs Jose Velasquez and Carlos Salazar look set for long international careers, and central midfielders Francisco Flores and Rafael Acosta have also made a contribution. However, little playmaker Pena could be the most interesting of the lot.

Turning to youth has had no detrimental affect on results and, perhaps to their own surprise, Venezuela are back in contention for a place in South Africa after picking up seven points from the last three games – a run of form that began with a dream debut from the 19-year-old Pena. He appeared as a second-half substitute in the home game against Colombia and recalls: "It was a complicated game and the coach told me to do what I had done in the Under-20 Championship – get on the ball and try and set up the play."

It was a role he had carried out well with the juniors, operating either centrally behind the strikers or wider on the right, scoring twice in the campaign and frequently generating ideas. So, when a deflection fell to him in the left channel, he pierced the defence with a dribble and sent in a low cross that allowed Nicolas Fedor to break the deadlock from close range.

The goal confirmed the creator's status as the brightest young talent in Venezuela, an impression he was re-enforcing on a weekly basis with Estudiantes in his home town of Merida. And now he has carried that promise to Portugal to join Braga, where he is seen as a replacement for Uruguayan midfielder Luis Aguiar, who was sold to Dynamo Moscow.

Time will tell if the youngster is crossing the Atlantic too soon. The move will test both his technique and his temperament – he picked up a couple of red cards with Estudiantes and was lucky to escape with just a yellow after leaving a foot in on Uruguay captain Diego Lugano in a recent World Cup qualifier.

If he can save his dancing feet for more constructive purposes he can continue to make history with Venezuela. South Africa is probably too soon but, as part of the team that has already qualified for their country's first ever FIFA finals, maybe one day he can help the senior side make their World Cup debut.

Tim Vickery

FACT FILE

Club Braga (Por)
Country Venezuela
Born December 25, 1989, in Merida
Previous club Estudiantes
International debut March 2009 v Colombia
International caps 4 (0 goals)

Gabriel OBERTAN

French starlet snapped up by United

ANY Manchester United supporter questioning Alex Ferguson's decision to pay Bordeaux £3million for their young attacker should have tuned into the annual Toulon Tournament in June.

The likes of Thierry Henry, Paul Gascoigne, Alan Shearer, David Ginola, Rui Costa and Juan Roman Riquelme have all used the Mediterranean festival as a springboard to greatness, and on the basis of his outstanding performances at this summer's event Obertan could – if he is not sidetracked by fame and fortune – enjoy similar success.

Raised in the Paris suburbs, Obertan can turn his hand to any position in the attacking third: striker, winger, creative midfielder or in the hole.

For the Toulon competition, France Under-21 boss Eric Mombaerts thought it best to make him a player of no fixed abode, giving him total freedom to float wherever he desired. Wide right or left, at the point of attack or pulling deep, Obertan was as effective as he was stylish – and he was a threat no one was able to neutralise.

In the Final, which France lost 1-0 to Chile, his gifts were most impressively showcased: the extra gear he seems to possess when gliding past opponents, the devilish dribbling ability, comfort on the ball in tight spots, the imagination and the upright stance which always makes for the best possible vision. Even though he ended up on the losing side he was the man of the match. This was the Obertan which Real Madrid were looking at back in early 2008.

While he clearly is something special, it has to be added that he has accomplished far more for his country than he has in his club career. Despite making his Bordeaux debut at 17, it was felt he lacked physical presence and composure in front of goal, and he tended to be used as a sub.

After two-and-a-half years in a bit-part role, he came to the conclusion midway through last season that he had to get away.

"I'd only begun two games for Bordeaux," he explains. "It's hard to shine when all you have is short bursts on the pitch and you are constantly shifted from one position to another."

In January, he went to Lorient on loan. It should have been a marriage of convenience, with regular top-flight football in a team whose play he described on joining as "direct and attractive".

Once again, though, the gremlins did their worst. His relationship with coach Christian Gourcuff – the father of France and Bordeaux star Yoann – was one of mutual mistrust from the off and, as winter became spring, he started less and less.

Tellingly, Gourcuff senior has no qualms in expressing his surprise at Obertan's move to the Premier League: "He certainly has talent but also some weaknesses. I hope he succeeds, but he does have a mental barrier to overcome."

Whether Ferguson can help the youngster to manage that remains to be seen.

Nick Bidwell

FACT FILE

Club Manchester United (Eng)
Country France
Born February 26, 1989, in Pantin (Paris)
Previous clubs CMS Pantin, Paris FC, Paris Saint-Germain, INF Clairefontaine, Bordeaux, Lorient (loan)
Honours French League Cup 2007

FRANCE

The ultimate

Keir Radnedge remembers the rivalry between Johan Cruyff and Franz Beckenbauer in the 1970s

THE 1970s WERE A unique era in world football. It was the first decade of colour television, and the dazzling tones and textures of the football played by Pele in the 1970 World Cup – and then by Johan Cruyff and Franz Beckenbauer – propelled the game at high speed towards its present remarkable pre-eminence.

The perspective of time lends a ever-sharper edge to the personal duel between the greatest-ever players of Holland and Germany; a duel played out in personal achievement built on the contrasting foundations laid at Ajax and Bayern Munich, and at international level, between two hugely contrasting managers in Rinus Michels and Helmut Schon.

Ernest Hemingway tracked the "dangerous summer" of the rivalry in 1959 between bullfighters Luis Miguel Dominguin and his brother-in-law Antonio Ordonez, while 1973-74 was a version rewritten for the football pitches of Europe and played out in front of a worldwide audience on television.

The great teams, big personalities and major talking points

power game

In May 1973 Cruyff was in the ascendancy. He was 26, had just become a European club champion for the third time in a row with Ajax and was on his way to the second of his three European Footballer of the Year awards. He was perceived as an inspirational revolutionary at the heart of the total football creation in Amsterdam.

Moreover, Cruyff's delicate directness had stolen the thunder from the football revolution which Beckenbauer had led a year earlier in captaining West Germany to European Championship success from his impatiently nurtured role as an attacking sweeper.

Ajax, on their treble chance route to Belgrade, had reserved their most devastating football for the quarter-final first leg against Beckenbauer's Bayern. The first half in Amsterdam's old Olympic Stadium ended goalless, then Arie Haan (two) and Gerrie Muhren scored three goals in 13 minutes and Cruyff added a deft fourth with two minutes left. Ajax won 4-1 and could easily afford not only a 2-1 defeat in Munich but one incurred without need of the assistance of Cruyff, who absented himself on the grounds of a minor knee injury.

Change of balance

However, within months the balance of power at personal, club and country levels had changed. Michels had quit for Barcelona in 1972; Cruyff then followed him for a world record £922,000 as the Spanish federation extended its transfer registration deadline (another counter to the old Catalan whinge that the sport's Spanish authorities only dance to a Madrid tune).

Coining it...Cruyff and Beckenbauer check the toss at the 1974 World Cup Final

Hat-trick heroes... Cruyff and Barry Hulshoff hoist the European Cup after Ajax's 1-0 win over Juventus in the 1973 Final, the club's third successive triumph

And so the European club stage had been rebalanced. In the Champions Cup Ajax, without Cruyff, fell to CSKA Sofia in the second round; Bayern, in full cry, stormed through to face Atletico Madrid in the Final in the Heysel Stadium, Brussels.

Atletico were there for the taking. Juan Carlos Lorenzo, coaching doyen of pragmatism, had wound up some fine fellow Argentinians to such an extent that three were suspended from the Final after a furiously chaotic semi-final against Celtic.

Bayern, for all the creative class of Beckenbauer and goal-grabbing genius of Gerd Muller, made no impression on the defence protecting Miguel Reina – father of Liverpool keeper Pepe Reina – in the Atletico goal. Six minutes before the end of extra-time Luis Aragones – destined for European glory but not until 2008 – curled a long, looping free-kick beyond Bayern keeper Sepp Maier.

As Lorenzo waved everyone back, Bayern coach Udo Lattek urged his men forward. Atletico held on tight until stoppage time. Then Hans-Georg Schwarzenbeck, Bayern's ponderous stopper, let fly in desperation from 35 yards and was as amazed as anyone in the ground to find he had scored one of his rare goals.

No penalties in those days; for the first and last time the Final went to a replay. Injuries, fatigue and suspension took their toll and Bayern won 4-0 at a canter. Muller and Uli Hoeness (now general manager) scored two each.

Bayern thus picked up the Champions crown which Ajax had inevitably relinquished the day they sold Cruyff to Barcelona. And Bayern, just like Ajax before them, would seal a hat-trick of European Cups before Liverpool, Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa imposed English law.

Defeating Atletico had seen Bayern complete a German double. A week earlier Magdeburg had become the first and last East German club to win a European trophy, surprisingly beating Milan in the Final of the Cup-winners Cup in Rotterdam before an underwhelmed 5,000 crowd.

Now, with the leagues and cups out of the way, football's focus swung towards the World Cup finals. The battleground may have been different but the rivalries remained the same: Holland and West Germany, Cruyff and Beckenbauer.

Brooding suspicion

The 1974 World Cup finals were played out in an atmosphere of brooding suspicion. Two years earlier the West German authorities had determined to make the Munich Olympics "the friendly Games" and in doing so try to dispel, as far as was possible, the poisonous shadow of the previous German summer Olympics, in Berlin in 1936.

But trying to escape fate was futile. Ten days after the opening ceremony in Munich's spider's web Olympic Stadium, Black September terrorists attacked the Israel team and 17 deaths resulted. Two years later, forget "friendly" track-suited police; think a mass of armed guards. The images had been turned on their head.

The brightest feature at the World Cup finals was the football played by the Dutch. Michels as coach, and Cruyff as captain and leader, had returned from Barcelona to revive the style and glory of total football.

Cruyff's arrogantly stylish Holland played six matches in the two groups, winning five, drawing one, scoring 14 goals and conceding one. They celebrated with a champagne, poolside party with an abandon that went down extremely badly with their wives and girlfriends back home.

RIVALS REUNITED ...on Cosmos tour of Europe

JOHAN CRUYFF AND FRANZ BECKENBAUER were briefly members of the same team when Cruyff played an exhibition game for New York Cosmos as part of a European tour in autumn 1978. Here, Cruyff (top row, second from right, without a shirt number) lined up alongside Beckenbauer (top row, third from left) before a friendly against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge. The match, in front of 40,000 spectators, ended 1-1. Dennis Tueart scored for Cosmos, Ray Wilkins equalised for Chelsea.

Cosmos continued on their tour to Germany, Spain, Italy and Turkey, while Cruyff joined Los Angeles Aztecs, spending a season there followed by a year with Washington Diplomats, before returning to Europe and ending his career with Ajax and Feyenoord.

Bragging rights...Jurgen Sparwasser (left) scores East Germany's winner in the 1974 all-German clash

Champs...Beckenbauer lifts the 1974 European Cup

Mr Angry...Cruyff yells at World Cup Final ref Taylor

By clumsy contrast, Beckenbauer's West Germany – though winning five out of six matches, scoring 11 goals and conceding three – lost, most painfully, to East Germany in Hamburg in the one and only international between the two cousins. They squabbled among themselves, Schon became paralysed by indecision and Beckenbauer made the necessary changes, even dropping – temporarily – his Bayern team-mate Hoeness.

"Would it have all been different if Cruyff had not left Ajax when he did? Would Ajax, not Bayern, have won the European Cup and the Dutch then carried the winning momentum to ultimate World Cup victory?"

The great rivalry of the age was then reignited at its most rarefied level: the World Cup Final.

The tale has been told many times of how English referee Jack Taylor held up kick-off to place the corner flags and then awarded the first-ever World Cup Final penalty. How Johan Neeskens fired Holland ahead before any German had touched the ball. How Paul Breitner levelled from the second-ever World Cup Final penalty. And how Muller snatched a second goal shortly before half-time.

Holland replaced injured left winger Rob Rensenbrink at half-time with Rene Van de Kerkhof. They flowed forward but, with Cruyff distracted after an ill-judged verbal joust with Taylor, were stifled. Not total football but total failure and Holland went the way of Hungary – also against West Germany – in 1954.

Thus Beckenbauer, not Cruyff, hoisted the World Cup; thus hosts West Germany, not Holland, were crowned world champions; thus Kaiser Franz sealed the legend which would take him on to three European Footballer prizes of his own, to a missionary role at New York Cosmos in the North American Soccer League, to World Cup success as manager in 1990, to a vice-presidency of the German federation, to the presidency of Bayern Munich, to leader of the winning bid to host the 2006 World Cup, to organising president...and now to a seat on the executive committees of UEFA and FIFA.

Would it all have been different if Cruyff had not left Ajax when he did? If he had stayed one more year would Ajax, not Bayern, have won the Champions Cup in May 1974? Would the Dutch then have boasted the winning momentum which would have carried them not only through the World Cup first and second rounds but through to ultimate victory?

Holland v West Germany plus Cruyff v Beckenbauer initiated the footballing equation which added up to the 1974 World Cup Final.

It was, if you like, the ultimate Power Game. ●

Discuss this at worldsoccer.com/forums

FROM THE ARCHIVES

SEPTEMBER 1974

Johan Cruyff writes: Life can be hard for a player

ANYONE who believes that there aren't managers in the game who order one of their hard defenders to kick a key forward out of a match is either simply naive or, like the ostrich, burying his head in the sand.

There are players in all corners of the world whose sole claim to fame is that they have regularly snuffed out opposing sides' star forwards by foul means. I know this and I can assure you I speak from experience.

I remember reading an article by Geoff Hurst some years ago in which he said: "Although on many occasions I become utterly sick and tired of being hacked to pieces, I have learned to live with it. Now I hardly ever find that robust marking upsets me. You only get yourself into more trouble if you retaliate."

There never was a truer statement. And in a way I think he was also trying to say that it is still possible to enjoy your football nowadays if you deal with the kickers in the correct manner. The lesson I have learned from my experiences at the hands of vicious defenders will, I hope, influence other ball players.

JOHAN CRUYFF
(Barcelona and Holland)
writes

Life for a player can be hard

Because if they do what I have done, in other words destroy the villains with their skills and not their fists, I am convinced that they will enjoy their football as much as I do.

SOCCER CITIES

BUDAPEST The clubs, the history, what to see, how to get there

National pride...the crowd at the Ferenc Puskas Stadium celebrate a 3-0 World Cup qualifying win over Malta in April

Magical history tour

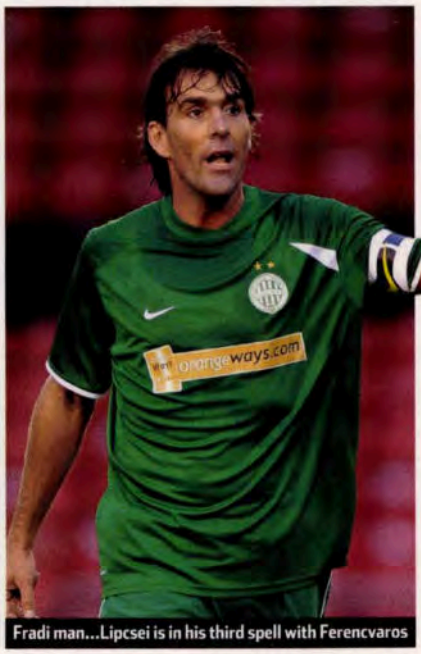
Peterjon Cresswell reports from the home of the once-mighty Magyars

HUNGARY'S CAPITAL is a treasure trove of European football history, packed with artefacts from a golden post-war age. But while contemporary crowds and playing standards may be somewhat lower than before, old rivalries still make for a fiery local scene. And, as the home of five top-flight clubs, it is sometimes possible for visitors to Budapest to catch three matches in one weekend.

Formed in 1899, Ferencvaros are the country's best-supported and most successful club. Taking their name from the city's ninth district in which they are based (it is known as Franzstadt in German, hence the club's nickname: Fradi), the club dominated the domestic game in Hungary – along with MTK – before the war. Imre Schlosser scored a hatfuls of goals for both clubs, while Gyorgy Sarosi was the big Fradi star of the 1930s.

The favoured club of Arrow Cross – the Hungarian Nazi party – Ferencvaros fell foul of the post-war Communist authorities and it was not until the 1960s that their fortunes were revived. With the 1967 European Footballer of the Year, Florian Albert, leading the line, Fradi enjoyed regular European progress and became the only Hungarian club to win an international trophy, claiming the Fairs Cup in 1965.

Another iconic figure, Tibor Nyilasi, helped the club to the European Cup-winners Cup Final of 1975, and when he took over as coach in the 1990s he steered Fradi to further domestic success. An impressive midfield, which included Peter Lipcsei and Krisztian Lisztes, helped the club make a sole Champions



Fradi man...Lipcsei is in his third spell with Ferencvaros

THE STADIUMS

www.magyarfutball.hu-Balcai Gusztáv

1 JOZSEF BOZSIK STADIUM
The first ground in Hungary to be named after a player. Home to Honved and has a modern-day capacity of 9,500.

2 FLORIAN ALBERT STADIUM
With the 18,100-capacity due to be expanded to 25,000, Ferencvaros will play at the national stadium next year.

www.magyarfutball.hu-Daniel Sulyok

3 NANDOR HIDEGKUTI STADIUM
Built in 1912 and able to hold 12,700 people, the home of MTK was where football film *Escape to Victory* was shot.

www.magyarfutball.hu-Csiba Egyedi

4 FERENC SZUSZA STADIUM
Ujpest's ground was opened in 1922 and renovated in 2000-01, giving it a capacity of 13,501.

www.magyarfutball.hu-Miklós Nemeth

5 RUDOLF ILLOVSKY STADIUM
Named after the legendary Vasas coach who passed away last year. Has a capacity of 18,000.

6 FERENC PUSKAS STADIUM
Built in 1954, with an original capacity of 104,000, internationals are staged here but the capacity is restricted to 68,976.

League group-stage appearance in 1995. However, racist chanting in a home tie against Ajax highlighted a problem that the club seemed incapable of dealing with.

With derbies matches against Ujpest becoming increasingly violent, corrupt mismanagement also saw the balance sheets suffer and Ferencvaros started haemorrhaging money. The crunch came in 2006 when the Hungarian FA threw the club out of the league for financial mismanagement and the 28-times champions were relegated for the first time in their history.

Real hero...Puskas won three European Cups in Madrid

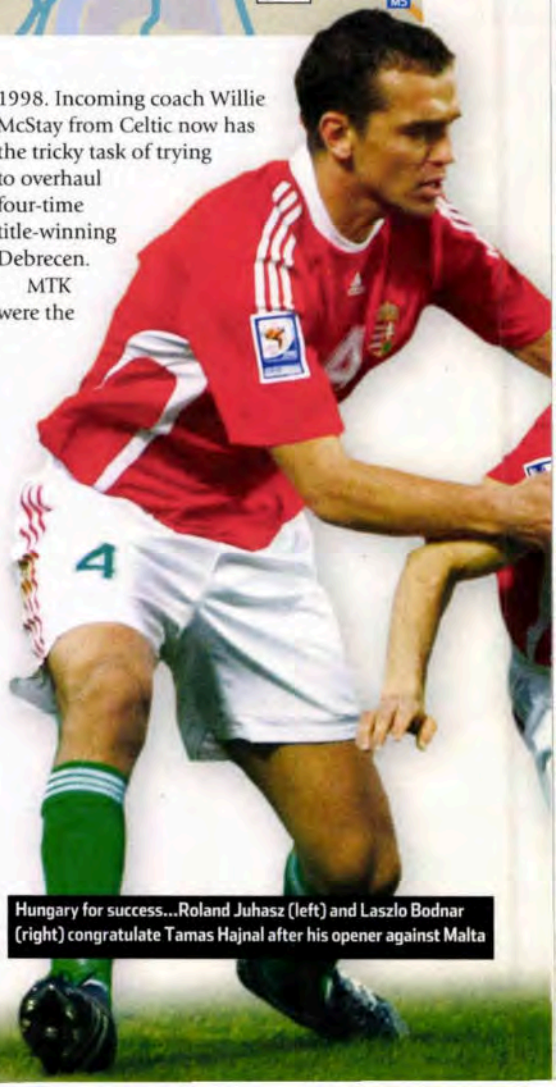
Having failed to gain promotion at the first attempt, Fradi were put up for sale and eventually bought by Kevin McCabe, the owner of English second-tier club Sheffield United who has footballing interests all over the globe. After missing out on promotion for a second season, McCabe brought in English coach Bobby Davison and several players from the UK. Plans for a new 25,000-seater stadium, with a hotel and office space, were unveiled in December and Ferencvaros finally gained promotion this summer.

Golden era

Ujpest also enjoyed pre-war success but their huge popularity is based on a the era between 1969 and 1979 when the club won nine titles, with prolific goalscorer Ferenc Bene and nimble forward Andras Torocsik the key figures. The Lilacs then lost ground to Honved and Ferencvaros before bouncing back to win the title in 1990. However, despite impressive renovations to their stadium, the club continue to suffer from poor management.

A string of ill-conceived nursery arrangements with Western clubs have fizzled out and Ujpest have not won the title since 1998. Incoming coach Willie McStay from Celtic now has the tricky task of trying to overhaul four-time title-winning Debrecen.

MTK were the



Hungary for success...Roland Juhasz (left) and Laszlo Bodnar (right) congratulate Tamas Hajnal after his opener against Malta

dominant force in central Europe after World War I as English coach Jimmy Hogan helped create the short-passing game that formed the basis for Hungary's great sides decades later.

Traditionally regarded as a Jewish club, MTK saw many of their players and officials disappear during the war. Later, after being taken over by the communist secret police, they developed star players such as Nandor Hidegkuti, Mihaly Lantos and Jozsef Zakarias for the brilliant Mighty Magyars national team of the early 1950s. Respected coaches Marton Bukovi and Gusztav Sebes were also involved with the club but, although they

> **"Local boys Puskas and Bozsik helped Honved win five titles in six years"**

won the title as recently as 2008, MTK have struggled to build a fan base.

Honved, from Kispest, used to be known as the army team and boyhood pals Ferenc Puskas and Jozsef Bozsik, who were raised in the neighbourhood, helped the club win five titles in six years.

After the uprising of 1956 and Puskas' departure for Spain, Honved came back strongly in the 1980s, thanks to players such as Lajos Detari. However, financial problems saw the club undergo several name changes before restaurant-chain owner George Hemingway tidied up the accounts and the dilapidated ground.

Vasas, from the working-class district of Angyalfold, had their heyday in the early 1960s when World Cup performers Kalman Meszoly and Janos Farkas were at the club.

Now deep in financial trouble and desperate for new investment, Vasas are just happy to still be clinging on for another season of top-flight football at their modest little ground. ●

BUDAPEST SURVIVAL GUIDE

Pearl of the Danube

● ARRIVAL & TRANSPORT

Ferihegy airport is 13 miles from the city centre. Zona Taxis (4,500HUF) or a minibus (2,990HUF) will take you to your hotel, while trains (300HUF) run to Nyugati station. The city's other main station, Keleti, serves Vienna, Germany and much of the region. Metro lines, buses, trams and trolleybuses all run on a standard ticket (300HUF).

● HOTELS & INFORMATION

Hotel details can be found at www.budapestinfo.hu. The most impressive is the Four Seasons Gresham Palace (V.Roosevelt ter 5-6, 36 1 268 6000/www.fourseasons.com, €400). Budapest is known for its spa hotels and the Gellert (XI.Szent Gellert ter, 36 1 889 5500/www.danubiusgroup.com/gellert, €150) is famously ornate, although some rooms require renovation.

● EATING & DRINKING

Hungarian food is hearty, spicy and best enjoyed at traditional restaurants such as Muzeum (VIII. Muzeum korut 12, 00 36 1 267 0375). Football-related venues include the 6:3 bar (XI.Lonyay utca 62, 00 36 1 217 0748), themed after Hungary's victory over England in 1953, and the Puskas Pancho Sport Pub (III. Becsi ut 56, 00 36 1 333 5656). Try the Caledonia (VI.Mozsar utca 9, 00 36 1 311 7611/www.caledonia.hu) for televised games. Beer costs 500-600HUF.

● DAYTIME ENTERTAINMENT

Boat tours of the Danube set off from the dock. Buda's Castle District contains the Fishermen's Bastion, Matthias Church and the National Gallery. The Great Market Hall near Szabadsag Bridge is a tourist sight and shopping destination. Tourist shops line Vaci utca, with fashion boutiques nearby.

● MATCH DAY

The Ferenc Puskas Stadium is on red metro line 2 (Stadionok stop) and is also used for concerts. Ferencvaros play at Ulloi ut 129, by the Nepliget metro stop on blue line 3. Vasas are based further up on the blue line, near Forgach utca. For Ujpest, go to the terminus at Ujpest-Kozpont and travel four stops on buses 96 or 104 to Megyeri ut. MTK are on the other side of Nepliget park, at Salgotarjani ut, accessed on tram 1 from Stadionok. Honved's Bozsik Jozsef Stadium is located in the south west of the city. Kispest, on the main suburban line from Josefvaros, is a five-minute walk from the stadium.

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

● Ferenc Puskas Stadium
Sep 5 Hungary v Sweden
Sep 9 Hungary v Portugal
● Jozsef Bozsik Stadium
Oct 3 Honved v Vasas
● Florian Albert Stadium
Sep 12 Ferencvaros v MTK
● Nandor Hidegkuti Stadium
Oct 17 MTK v Fehervar
● Ferenc Szusza Stadium
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INTERNATIONALS

Page 116 **Gold Cup**
Page 117 **Friendlies**
Page 119 **World Cup qualifiers**

DIGEST

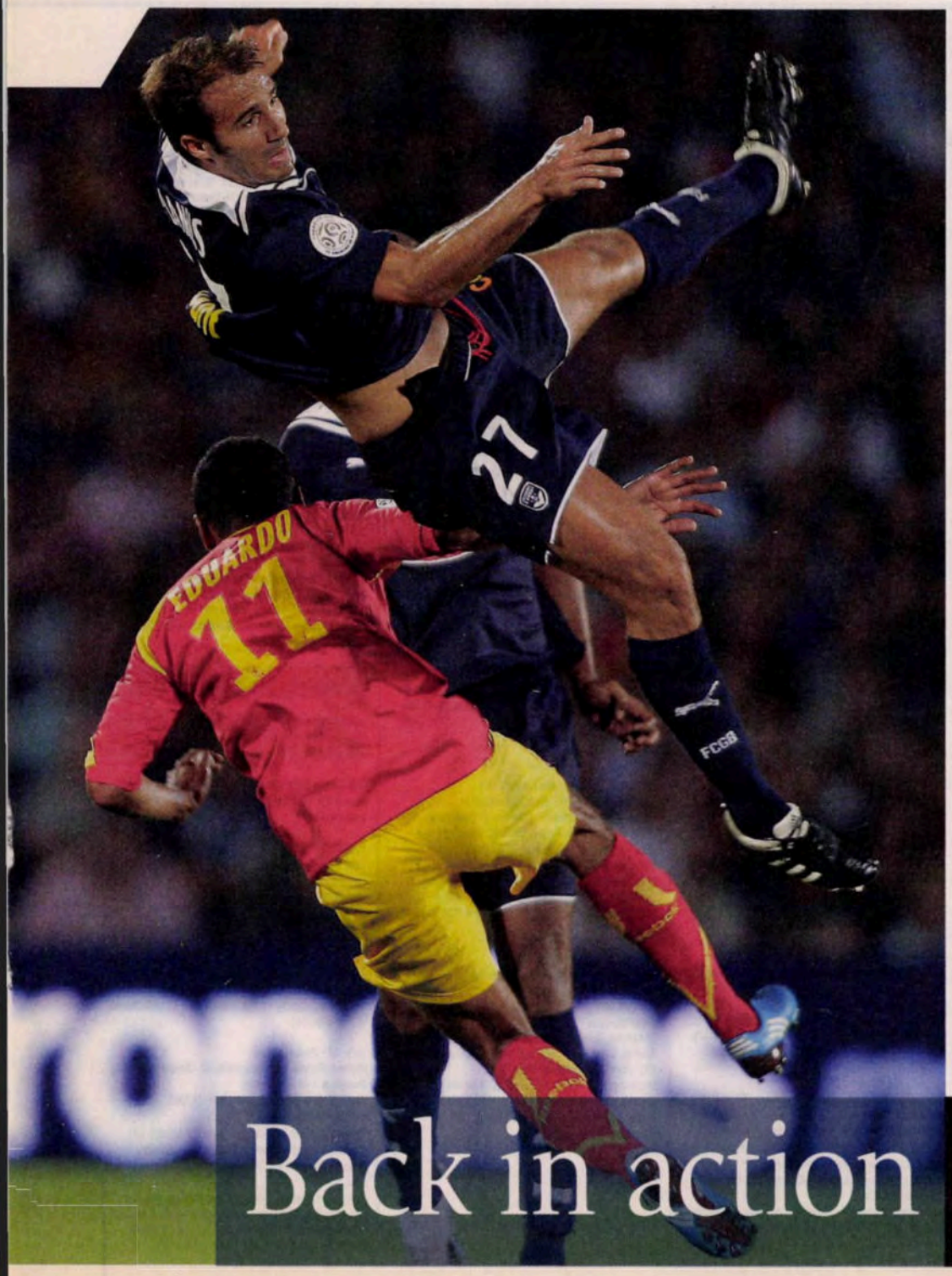
Page 121 **Internationals**
Page 122 **Europe**
Page 123 **Asia**
Page 124 **People in the news**

PREVIEWS

Page 125 **Croatia**
Page 126 **Poland**
Page 127 **Ukraine**
Page 128 **Albania/Slovenia**

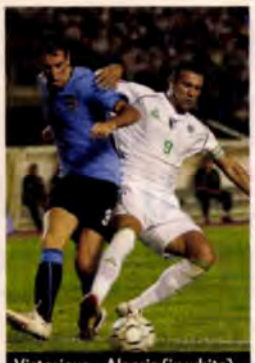
CLUB RESULTS

Page 130 **Champions League**
Page 130 **Europa League**
Page 130 **European leagues**
Page 134 **South American leagues**
Page 136 **Central & North America**
Page 136 **Africa**
Page 137 **Asia**
Page 137 **Forthcoming fixtures**



Back in action

Marc Planus of Bordeaux helped the reigning champions get off to a flying start with a 4-1 victory over Lens at the Chaban-Delmas stadium as the French Ligue 1 season got underway. More information and tables, page 131.


Victorious...Algeria (in white)

ALGERIA

First South American success for 27 years

The Desert Foxes recorded their first victory over South American opposition for 27 years when they beat Uruguay 1-0 in Algiers, thanks to a goal from Rafik Djebbour.

Algeria's last success against a country from that continent was versus Chile during the 1982 World Cup.

Super sub...Datolo (right)

ARGENTINA

Datolo's dream debut

Diego Maradona called up Napoli midfielder Jesus Datolo for the friendly against Russia and the youngster scored the winner in a 3-2 victory seconds after appearing as a sub.

BRAZIL

Nine in a row

Luis Fabiano of Sevilla scored just before half-time to secure a 1-0 friendly victory against Estonia and give Brazil their ninth successive win.

"The important thing was to give our work continuity, keep winning and give everyone a game," said national coach Dunga, who substituted Kaka and Robinho in the second half and handed an international debut to Atletico Mineiro striker Diego Tardelli.

RESULTS

CONCACAF GOLD CUP

In the United States

Group A

July 3 - Carson
Canada 1 (Gerba 75)
Jamaica 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
Canada: Sutton - McKenna, Jakovic, De Jong (Simpson 46), Stalteri, De Guzman, Bernier, Hutchinson, Klukowski, Johnson (Jackson 70), Gerba.
Jamaica: Ricketts - C Davis (Cummings 82), Gardner, Marshall, D Stewart, J Johnson (Campbell-Ryce 76), Phillips, Austin (Thompson 71), Morrison, Shelton, Fuller.

July 3 - Carson
Costa Rica 1 (W Granados 64)
El Salvador 2 (Romero 19, 87)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Archundia (Mex)
Costa Rica: Navas - L Gonzalez, Wallace (Herron 32), Segares, Fernandez, Herrera, Sirias (Brenes 72), Centeno, Borges, Ledezma (W Granados 54), Saborio.
El Salvador: Montes - Escobar, Pacheco, Salazar, Marvin Gonzalez, Sanchez, Castillo (Alas 79), Coreas, Julio Martinez (Rudis Corrales 61), Romero, Reyes (Henriquez 89).

July 7 - Columbus
Jamaica 0
Costa Rica 1 (Borges 62)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 7,059. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Jamaica: Ricketts - C Davis, Gardner, Marshall, D Stewart (Shelton 69), J Johnson, Phillips, Austin, Fuller (Morrison 46), Cummings, Addlery (Thompson 46). *Sent off: Austin 35min.*
Costa Rica: R Gonzalez - Wallace, Fernandez, Marshall, Delgado, Sirias (Arias 78), Centeno, Borges, Alonso (Herrera 52), Ledezma (W Granados 52), Saborio.

July 7 - Columbus
El Salvador 0
Canada 1 (Gerba 32)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 7,059. **Ref:** Garcia (Mex)
El Salvador: Montes - Henriquez, Pacheco, Salazar, Marvin Gonzalez, Sanchez, Torres (Alas 46), Castillo (Rudis Corrales 63), Coreas, Romero, Reyes (Barrera 88).
Canada: Sutton - McKenna, Jakovic, Stalteri, De Guzman, Bernier, Hutchinson, Klukowski, Simpson (De Jong 86), Johnson, Gerba (Jackson 76).

July 10 - Miami
Costa Rica 2 (Herron 23, Centeno 35)
Canada 2 (Bernier 25, De Jong 28)
HT: 2-2. **Att:** 17,269. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
Costa Rica: R Gonzalez - Wallace (Herrera 70), Segares, Fernandez, Marshall, Sirias, Centeno (E Granados 85), Borges, Alonso (W Granados 38), Herron, Saborio.
Canada: Sutton - McKenna, Hainault, Hastings, De Jong, Bernier, Hutchinson, Peters, Simpson (Nakajima-Farran 46), Johnson (Gerba 75), Jackson (Cann 81).

July 10 - Miami
El Salvador 0
Jamaica 1 (Cummings 69)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 17,269. **Ref:** Hospedales (T&T)
El Salvador: Montes - Escobar, Henriquez, Salazar, Marvin Gonzalez (Reyes 71), Umanzor, Sanchez (Turcios 45), Castillo (Coreas 74), Romero, Zelaya, Rudis Corrales.
Jamaica: Ricketts - Gardner (Addlery 78), Thomas, Marshall, Campbell-Ryce (J Johnson 68), Thompson, Phillips, Morrison, Shelton, Fuller (Richards 85), Cummings.

CONCACAF GOLD CUP – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Canada	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Costa Rica	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Jamaica	3	1	0	2	1	2	3
El Salvador	3	1	0	2	2	3	3

Group B

July 4 - Seattle
Honduras 1 (Costly 76)
Haiti 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 15,387. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)
Honduras: Escober - Norales, Acevedo, O Chavez, Nery Medina, C Palacios, Espinoza (M Chavez 67), M Valladares (Castillo 82), Costly, W Martinez, Lalin (Welcome 61).
Haiti: Zephirin - Bertin, Gilles, Raymond, Bruny, Fucien, Marcelin, Sirin (Aveska 50), Noel (Jerome 79), Alexandre (Sampeur 61), Saint-Preux.

July 4 - Seattle
Grenada 0
United States 4 (Adu 7, Holden 31, Rogers 60, Davies 69)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 15,387. **Ref:** Lopez (Gtm)
Grenada: Noel - A Modeste, James, Langainge, Marshall, P Modeste, B Bubb, R Charles, S Rennie, K Bain (J Rennie 56), Julien (D Daniel 56).
United States: Perkins - Cherundolo (Evans 63), Marshall, Goodson (Parkhurst 71), Pearce, Pause, Beckerman, Rogers, Holden, Davies (Arnaud 69), Adu.

July 8 - Washington DC
Haiti 2 (Noel 13, Marcelin 79)
Grenada 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 26,079. **Ref:** Moreno (Pan)
Haiti: Zephirin - Bertin, Gilles, Raymond, Aveska, Bruny, Fucien (Jerome 69), Marcelin, Sirin (Chery 50), Noel (Merceus 88), Saint-Preux.
Grenada: Noel - A Modeste, James (R Daniel 26), Langainge, Marshall, P Modeste (Leo 68), B Bubb, R Charles, S Rennie, Facey, K Bain (Julien 71).

July 8 - Washington DC
United States 2 (Quaranta 74, Ching 79)
Honduras 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 26,079. **Ref:** Campbell (Jam)
United States: Perkins - Cherundolo, Marshall, Parkhurst, Pearce, Pause (Feilhaber 63), Beckerman, Rogers, Ching (Cooper 81), Quaranta, Adu (Davies 63).
Honduras: Escober - Norales, Acevedo, O Chavez, Nery Medina, C Palacios, Espinoza (Padilla 70), M Valladares, Costly (Welcome 79), W Martinez, M Chavez (Lalin 65).

July 11 - Foxborough
United States 2 (Arnaud 5, Holden 90)
Haiti 2 (Sirin 46, Chery 48)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 24,137. **Ref:** Quesada (CR)
United States: Robles - Conrad, Parkhurst, Heaps, Evans, Holden, Arnaud, Cronin, Cooper (Davies 63), Quaranta (Beckerman 63), Clark (Ching 76).
Haiti: Zephirin - Bertin, Gilles, Raymond, Aveska, Bruny, Chery, Marcelin, Sirin, Noel (Thermeus 78), Saint-Preux (Sampeur 84).

July 11 - Foxborough
Honduras 4 (W Martinez 2, Espinoza 25, M Valladares 56, Costly 67)
Grenada 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 24,137. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)
Honduras: Escober - Norales, Acevedo, O Chavez (J Palacios 70), Nery Medina, C Palacios (Garcia 46), Espinoza, M Valladares, Costly, W Martinez (Lopez 81), Lalin.
Grenada: A Baptiste - A Modeste, Langainge, Mark, P Modeste, S Rennie, Antoine (J Rennie 65), Brown, Paul, Facey, Julien (R Daniel 85).

CONCACAF GOLD CUP – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
United States	3	2	1	0	8	2	7
Honduras	3	2	0	1	5	2	6
Haiti	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Grenada	3	0	0	3	0	10	0

Group C

July 5 - Oakland
Panama 1 (Barahona 68)
Guadeloupe 2 (Loval 32, Fleurival 42)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 32,700. **Ref:** Brizan (T&T)
Panama: Penedo - Baloy, Moreno, R Torres, Gun, Gomez (Rodriguez 78), Phillips (Escobar 46), Barahona, A Henriquez, Garces (Tejada 82), B Perez.
Guadeloupe: Fausta - Avinel, Comminges, Tacalfred, Viator, Fleurival (Alphonse 77), Capoue, Gamiette, Auvray, Loval (Vertot 90), Antoine-Curier (Clavier 66).

July 5 - Oakland
Nicaragua 0
Mexico 2 (Noriega 45, Barrera 86)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 32,700. **Ref:** Ward (Can)
Nicaragua: Mendieta - S Aviles, D Solorzano, Alonso, Medina, A Reyes, Collado, Martinez (Franklin Lopez 67), Zeledon, Wilson (Barrera 82), Sanchez (Calero 61).
Mexico: G Ochoa - J A Castro, Magallon, Pinto, I Rodriguez, Torrado, Noriega (Esquivel 75), I Martinez (Barrera 46), Vela (A Medina 10), Sabah, Dos Santos.

July 9 - Houston
Guadeloupe 2 (Auvray 57, Gotin 59)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 47,713. **Ref:** Moncada (Hnd)
Guadeloupe: Fausta - Avinel, Comminges, Tacalfred, Viator, Fleurival, Capoue (Gendrey 77), Auvray, Loval (Gamiette 53), Gotin, Alphonse (Vertot 71). *Sent off: Tacalfred 66min.*
Nicaragua: Mendieta - S Aviles, D Solorzano, C Alonso, Medina (Franklin Lopez 81), A Reyes (G Aviles 62), Collado, Zeledon, Wilson, Calero, Sanchez (Barrera 60).

July 9 - Houston
Mexico 1 (Sabah 10)
Panama 1 (B Perez 29)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 47,713. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Mexico: G Ochoa - J A Castro, Magallon, Pinto, I Rodriguez, Torrado, Noriega, I Martinez (I Castro 46), A Medina (Barrera 68), Sabah (Bravo 46), Dos Santos. *Sent off: Noriega 45min.*
Panama: Penedo - Baloy, Moreno, R Torres, Gun, Escobar (Phillips 76), Gomez, Barahona (Rivera 46), A Henriquez, Garces (M Torres 62), B Perez. *Sent off: Gun 45min, Phillips 80min.*

July 12 - Glendale
Panama 4 (B Perez 35, Gomez 56, Tejada 76, 88)
Nicaragua 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 23,876. **Ref:** Pineda (Hnd)
Panama: Penedo - Moreno, Rivera, R Torres, Solanillo, Escobar (Blanco 72), Gomez (A Henriquez 59), Herrera, M Torres, Garces, B Perez (Tejada 66).
Nicaragua: Espinoza - S Aviles, D Solorzano, C Alonso, Medina, A Reyes (G Aviles 63), Collado (Molina 61), Franklin Lopez, Zeledon, Wilson (Barrera 77), Calero. *Sent off: Franklin Lopez 45min.*

July 12 - Glendale
Mexico 2 (Torrado 42, Sabah 85)
Guadeloupe 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 23,876. **Ref:** Brizan (T&T)
Mexico: G Ochoa - Magallon, Pinto, I Rodriguez, Juarez, Torrado, I Castro (J A Castro 75), Bravo, A Medina, Esquivel (Sabah 80), Dos Santos (Barrera 65).
Guadeloupe: Fausta - Comminges, Vertot, Viator, Lina, Fleurival, Gamiette, Auvray, Gendrey (Lambourde 75), Hanany (Clavier 56), Antoine-Curier (Gotin 64). *Sent off: Vertot 72min, Gotin 83min.*

CONCACAF GOLD CUP – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Guadeloupe	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Panama	3	1	1	1	6	3	4
Nicaragua	3	0	0	3	0	8	0

Top two in each group and the two third-placed countries with the best record qualified for the quarter-finals

Quarter-finals

July 18 - Philadelphia
Canada 0
Honduras 1 (W Martinez 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 32,000. **Ref:** Aguilar (ElS)
Canada: Sutton - McKenna, Hutchinson, Jakovic, Stalteri, De Guzman, Bernier, Klukowski, Simpson (Jackson 76), Johnson (Peters 71), Gerba.
Honduras: Escober - Norales, Acevedo, O Chavez, Nery Medina, C Palacios, Espinoza (Mejia 90), M Valladares, Costly, W Martinez (Lalin 72), M Chavez (J Palacios 81).

July 18 - Philadelphia
United States 2 (Beckerman 49, Cooper pen 105)
Panama 1 (B Perez 45)
Aet. **HT:** 0-1. **90mins:** 1-1. **Att:** 32,000.
Ref: Archundia (Mex)
United States: Perkins - Conrad (Goodson 45), Marshall, Heaps, Pearce, Pause, Beckerman, Rogers (Evans 110), Holden, Arnaud (Cooper 77), Ching.
Panama: Penedo - Baloy, Moreno, R Torres, Gun (Tejada 108), Escobar (Phillips 78), Gomez, M Torres, Barahona (Herrera 95), Garces, B Perez. *Sent off: Tejada 120min, Baloy 120min.*

Off and running...Le Guen

CAMEROON

Winning start for new Lions' boss Le Guen

Former Paris Saint-Germain coach Paul Le Guen got off to a winning start with the Indomitable Lions as they won 2-0 in a friendly away to Austria, in Klagenfurt.

Two goals in six minutes from Pierre Webo of Mallorca sealed the victory. Austria's Paul Scharner missed a first-half penalty when the game was still goalless.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Hasek opens with win

Despite falling behind to Jan Vertonghen's opener, Ivan Hasek made a victorious start as new national coach, with goals from Roman Hubnik, Milan Baros and David Rozehnal seeing off Belgium 3-1 in a friendly in Teplice.

FRANCE

Gignac makes his mark

Andre-Pierre Gignac, making his first start for *Les Blues*, scored the only goal of the game against Faroe Islands in their World Cup qualifier in Torshavn.

The Toulouse striker, who was winning his fourth cap, got his chance as Thierry Henry was injured and Karim Benzema started as a sub.

On target...Gignac

FRIENDLIES

Saturday, July 18

July 18 - Tianjin
China 3 (Qu Bo 11, Gao Lin 46, Yang Hao 59)
Palestine 1 (Keshkesh pen 88)
HT: 1-0

July 18 - Pak Kret
Thailand 4 (Teerasil 7, 16, Rangsan pen 8, Teeratep 46)
Pakistan 0
HT: 3-0

Saturday, July 25

July 25 - Tianjin
China 3 (Han Peng 17, Hao Junmin 28, Yu Hai 46)
Kyrgyzstan 0
HT: 2-0

Friday, August 7

Aug 7 - Houston, USA
Colombia 2 (Gutierrez 12, Mendoza 87)
El Salvador 1 (Moscoso 63)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,418. **Ref:** Marrufo (USA)
Colombia: Julio - Velez, Mendoza, Henriquez, Nunez, Viafara (Anchico 77), Palomino, Marrugo, L F Mosquera (Araujo 65), Gutierrez (Pabon 65), Ramos (Najera 84).
El Salvador: Montes - Salazar (Henriquez 58), Gonzalez, Escobar, Pacheco (Umanzor 46), Jimenez (Coreas 76), Flores, Romero (Alas 52), Quintanilla, Monteagudo (Moscoso 40), Reyes (Rudis Corrales 46).

Tuesday, August 11

Aug 11 - Dieppe, France
Benin 1 (Maiga 10)
Gabon 1 (Aubameyang 1)
HT: 1-1

Wednesday, August 12

Aug 12 - Tirana
Albania 6 (Skela pen 25, pen 44, Bogdani 65, Michael og 67, Agolli 71, Vila 75)
Cyprus 1 (Charalambidis 37)
HT: 2-1. **Ref:** B Yildirim (Tur)
Albania: Ujkani - Cana (Beqiri 72), Dallku, Curri, Vangjeli (Hyka 60), Bulku, Skela (Lika 66), Agolli, Duro (Sefa 76), Bogdani (Vila 67), Salihi (Bakaj 73).
Cyprus: Avgousti - Satsias (Michael 46), Avraam (Garpozis 46), Charalambidis, Charalambous, Elia (Panagi 77), Aloneftis (Alexandrou 56), Christou, Nikolaou (Marangos 59), Konstantinou (Cristofi 46), Okkas.

Aug 12 - Algiers
Algeria 1 (Djebbour 79)
Uruguay 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,000. **Ref:** Harzi (Tun)
Algeria: Gaouaoui (Chaouchi 46) - Matmour (Raho 76), Laifaoui, Bougherra, Belhadj, Ziani (Achiou 60), Mansouri (Saifi 46), Lemmouchia, Meghni (Bouazza 61), Ghezzal (Bezzaz 46), Djebbour (Abdeslam 85).
Uruguay: M Silva - B Silva, Lugano (Scotti 46), Godin (Valdez 75), Fucile (Amado 61), Eguren (A Fernandez 46), Gargano, A Pereira, Martinez (Cavani 61), Suarez (S Fernandez 82), Abreu (Lopez 46).

Aug 12 - Lisbon
Angola 2 (Flavio 55, Mateus 73)
Togo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 700. **Ref:** Proenca (Por)
Angola: Lama - Jamuana (Mabina 46), Joel (Rui Marques 46), Kali, Enoke, Yamba Asha (Gilberto 46), Chara (Nelo 46), Roger (Andre 46), Job (Mateus 46; David 87), Mantorras (Flavio 46), Love (Ze Kalanga 46).
Togo: Mensah - Toure, Akoto, Boussari, Atte-Oudeyi, Forson (Tekoui 65), Ahodikpe, Mango, Brenner, Dossevi, Adebayor.

Aug 12 - Yerevan
Armenia 1 (Arakelyan 75)
Moldova 4 (Golovatenco 34, 64, V Andronic 82, Epureanu pen 90+)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Silagava (Geo)
Armenia: Kasparov - Hovsepyan, Arakelyan (Kakosyan 90), Grigoryan (Edigaryan 85), Henrikh Mkhitaryan, Yavrunyan (Yagan 61), Malakyan (Manoyan 46), V Minasyan, Tadevosyan, Pizzelli (Goharyan 53), Agvan Mkrtchyan.
Moldova: Stanislav Namasco - Armas, Epureanu, Caraus (Suvurov 46), Lascencov (Serghei Namasco 73), Golovatenco, Cebotaru (Savinov 46), Bulat (V Andronic 77), Onica, Ovseannicov (Calincov 46), Bugaiov (Sofroni 46).

Aug 12 - Klagenfurt
Austria 0
Cameroon 2 (Webo 28, 35)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 28,800. **Ref:** Olsiak (Slk)
Austria: Macho (Payer 46) - Garics (Fuchs 46), Schiemer, Dragovic, Ortlechner (Prodi 46), Holzl (Trimmel 67), Pehlivan, Scharner (Leitgeb 40), Jantscher, Janko, Hoffer (Maierhofer 60).
Cameroon: Kameni - Geremi, N'Koulou, Bikey, Bassong (Binya 82), Tchoyi (Ngom Kome 46), Makoun (Chedjou 46), Emana, Mbia, Eto'o (Meyong Ze 65), Webo (Enoh 46).

Aug 12 - Sarajevo
Bosnia-Herzegovina 2 (Dzeko 52, 69)
Iran 3 (Shojaei 79, Borhani 86, Teymourian 90)
HT: 0-0
Bosnia-Herzegovina: Supic (Nurkovic 63) - Spahic (Radeljic 77), Nadarevic, Mravac, Bajramovic (Pandza 73), Salihovic, Jahic, Ibricic, Pjanic (Damjanovic 69), Ibisevic, Dzeko.
Iran: Rahmati - Kaebi, Aghili, Nosrati, Ashjari (Nouri 46), Nekounam, Teymourian, Heydari (Borhani 85), Zandi (Norouzi 66), Madanchi (Mobali 51), Shojaei (Ashoubi 90+).

Aug 12 - Sofia
Bulgaria 1 (Rangelov 54)
Latvia 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,000. **Ref:** Pamporidis (Gre)
Bulgaria: Mihailov - Tunchev (Kotev 46), Nikolov, Angelov, Popov (Domovchiyski 22), Georgiev (Vidanov 74), Milanov, Manolev, Yankov (Sarmov 46), M Petrov (Bojinov 59), Berbatov (Rangelov 46).
Latvia: Vanins - Mihadjuks (Blanks 67), Klava (Krjauklis 89), Ivanovs, Astafjevs, Kacanovs (Zirnis 83), Zigajevs (Solonicins 62), Cauna, Karlsons (Grebis 67), Kolesnicenko (Rafalskis 62), Rubins.

Aug 12 - East Rutherford, USA
Colombia 1 (Falcao Garcia 38)
Venezuela 2 (Rey 34, Vizcarrondo 72)
HT: 1-1. **Ref:** Prus (USA)
Colombia: Ospina (Julio 66) - L A Perea, I Cordoba, Yepes, Armero (Quintero 82), Vargas, Guarin, Viafara (Marin 67), L F Mosquera, Falcao Garcia (Montero 67), Gutierrez. *Sent off: Vargas 85min.*
Venezuela: Vega - Chacon, Rey, Vizcarrondo, Granados, Lucena, Di Giorgi, Rincon, Seijas (Fernandez 83), Fedor (Renteria 70), Maldonado (Moreno 68). *Sent off: Fernandez 87min.*

Aug 12 - Teplice
Czech Republic 3 (Hubnik 27, Baros pen 42, Rozehnal 78)
Belgium 1 (Vertonghen 12)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 13,890. **Ref:** Sippel (Ger)
Czech Republic: Cech - Grygera (Pospech 46), Sivok, Hubnik (Rozehnal 46), Kadlec, Stajner (Simunek 88), Jarolim (Jankulovski 46), Polak, Plasil, Baros (Pudil 46), Sverkos (Necid 65).
Belgium: Stijnen - Vanden Borre, Van Damme (Deschacht 80), Van Buyten, Vermaelen (Simons 46), De Sutter (Sonck 46), Vertonghen (Alderweireld 87), Fellaini (E Mpenza 46), Hazard (Mirallas 68), Dembele, Defour.

Aug 12 - Brondby
Denmark 1 (Schone 63)
Chile 2 (Paredes 61, Sanchez 69)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 8,700. **Ref:** Jakobsen (Ice)
Denmark: Andersen (Christiansen 46) - Jakobsen (Kvist 46), Christensen, Kjaer, Jacobsen (Stadsgaard 68), Christian Poulsen, Tomasson (Norregaard 79), J Poulsen, Rommedahl, Bendtner (Schone 61), Martin Jorgensen (Gronkjaer 55).
Chile: Pinto - Isla, Jara, Medel, Vidal, Tello (Cereceda 59), Carmona, Fernandez, Sanchez, Beausejour, Mancilla (Paredes 39).

Aug 12 - Blois, France
DR Congo 1 (Makiadi 73)
Senegal 2 (P Cisse 66, 69)
HT: 0-0

Aug 12 - East Rutherford, USA
Ecuador 0
Jamaica 0
Ecuador: Cevallos (Elizaga 46) - Ibarra (Guagua 80), Fleitas, Hurtado, W Ayovi, Castillo, Quiroz (Palacios 51), Noboa, Montero (I Mina 75), Rojas (Hidalgo 90), C Tenorio (Matamoros 65).
Jamaica: Miller - J Taylor, Thomas, Dicoy Williams, Phillips, Stephenson (Edwards 65), Morrison, Vernan (Palmer 78), Richards (Boyd 72), Shelton (Cummings 55), Hodges (Daley 65).

Aug 12 - Cairo
Egypt 3 (Abd Rabou 3, 31, Abdelmalek 90)
Guinea 3 (Youla 30, 40, Diawara 48)
HT: 2-2

Aug 12 - Tallinn
Estonia 0
Brazil 1 (Luis Fabiano 43)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 8,550. **Ref:** Ingvarsson (Swe)
Estonia: Pareiko - Enar Jaager, Barengrub, Piiroja, Klavan, S Puri (Purje 89), Dmitrijev (Vunk 61), Vassiljev, Lindpere (Kruglov 61), Kink (Viikmae 72), Zenjov (Voskoboinikov 61). *Sent off: Kruglov 87min.*
Brazil: Julio Cesar - Maicon (Daniel Alves 60), Lucio (Miranda 68), Luisao, Felipe Melo, Andre Santos, Kleberson (Elano 38), Gilberto Silva, Luis Fabiano (Nilmar 66), Kaka (Julio Baptista 60), Robinho (Diego Tardelli 60).

Record-breaker...Cannavaro

127 internationals played by Fabio Cannavaro, who becomes Italy's most-capped player

MOROCCO

Moumen takes charge

Hassan Moumen, coach of FUS de Rabat, has been handed a three-month contract as interim boss of the national team following the sacking of Roger Lemerre.

Moumen will oversee the Atlas Lions' three remaining World Cup qualifiers.

POLAND

Double for new boy

French-born Ludovic Obraniak scored twice on his debut to give Poland a 2-0 win over Greece. The 24-year-old, who plays for Lille and had been capped by France at Under-21 level, became a Polish citizen in June through his grandfather.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

Irish out of luck

Giovanni Trapattoni's team lost 3-0 to Australia in Limerick – the host's first home international to be played outside Dublin in 24 years. Tim Cahill (two) and Dave Carney scored for the visitors at Thomond Park, the home of twice European rugby union champions Munster.

SLOVENIA

Stroll for the hosts

San Marino failed to manage

Aug 12 - London
Ghana 4 (Muntari 11, Himoonde og 30, Agogo pen 41, Dramani 43)
Zambia 1 (Sunzu 32)
HT: 4-1. **Ref:** Marriner (Eng)
Sent off: D Banda (Zambia) 40min
Ghana: Owu (Amamoo) - Paintsil, Afful, E Addo, Dickoh, Annan (Telfer), Essien (Awako), Inkoom, Dramani (Appiah), Muntari (Dickson), Agogo (Quansah).

Aug 12 - Amsterdam
Holland 2 (Kuijt 10, Van der Vaart 37)
England 2 (Defoe 49, 76)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 48,000. **Ref:** Rizzoli (Ita)
Holland: Stekelenburg - Heitinga, Mathijsen, Ooijer, Braafheid, Van Persie (Babel 46), De Jong, Schaars (Mendes da Silva 82), Van der Vaart (Sneijder 46), Robben (Afellay 55), Kuijt (Huntelaar 77).
England: Green - Johnson, Ferdinand, Terry, A Cole (Bridge 84), Beckham (Wright-Phillips 46), Barry (Carrick 46), Lampard, Young (Milner 68), Heskey (Defoe 46), Rooney (C Cole 58).

Aug 12 - Budapest
Hungary 0
Romania 1 (Ghioane 42)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 9,000. **Ref:** Vnuk (Slk)
Hungary: Babos - Vanczak, Gyepes (Feher 74), Juhasz, Bodor (Vadocz 83), Dardai (B Toth 76), Halmosi, Huszti (Gera 46), Hajnal, Dzsudzsak (Rudolf 46), Torghelle (Priskin 78).
Romania: Coman - Dananae (Maftei 39), Chivu (Constantin 82), Radoi (Codrea 60), Nesu, Mara (Roman 74), Ghioane, Apostol, Nicu (Golan 60), Marica, Danciulescu (Surdu 46).

Aug 12 - Reykjavik
Iceland 1 (K O Sigurdsson 60)
Slovakia 1 (Vittek 35)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 5,099. **Ref:** Christoffersen (Den)
Iceland: Gunnleifsson - Steinsson, K O Sigurdsson, Jonsson (A E Gunnarsson 50), I Sigurdsson, Palmason (Bjornsson 89), B Gunnarsson, Skulason, Hallfredson, Helguson (Johansson 86), Gudjohnsen (Gislason 77).
Slovakia: Mucha (Pernis 46) - Pekarik, Horvath (M Petras 54), Zabavnik, Cech (Kopunek 79), Karhan, Sestak, Kozak (Holosko 46), Hamsik, Stoch (Jendrisek 46), Vittek (Weiss 63).

Aug 12 - Vaduz
Liechtenstein 0
Portugal 3 (Hugo Almeida 15, 26, Raul Meireles 23)
HT: 0-3. **Ref:** Bertolini (Swi)
Liechtenstein: Jehle - Vogt (Rohrer 46), Martin Stocklasa, Michael Stocklasa, Oehri, Ritzberger (Rechsteiner 46), R Buchel, Polverino (S Buchel 82), Burgmeier (R Beck 74), T Beck (Christen 46), M Frick (Hasler 64).
Portugal: Eduardo (Moreira 62) - Bosingwa, Bruno Alves (Nani 73), Ricardo Carvalho (Rolando 63), Duda (Miguel 54), Pepe, Tiago (Joao Moutinho 54), Raul Meireles, Deco, Hugo Almeida, Simao (Eliseu 62).

Aug 12 - Luxembourg
Luxembourg 0
Lithuania 1 (Danilevicius 40)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 1,000. **Ref:** Black (NI)
Luxembourg: Joubert - Janisch (Martino 46), Payal (Pedro 76), Hoffmann, Blaise, Peters, Strasser, Bettmer, Bensi (Da Mota 46), Lombardelli (Collette 46), Mutsch (Kintziger 73).
Lithuania: Karcemarskas - Klimavicius (Alunderis 88), Skerla, Dedura, Stankevicius, Mikoliunas (Luksa 81), Semberas, Pilibaitis (Sernas 59), Ivaskevicius (Panka 66), D Cesnauskis (Trakys 73), Danilevicius.

Aug 12 - Skopje
Macedonia 2 (Pandev 8, 33)
Spain 3 (Fernando Torres 52, Pique 54, Riera 56)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Vink (Hol)
Macedonia: Nikoloski (Pacovski 66) - Sedloski (Lazarevski 46), Mitreski, Noveski (Mojsov 56), Popov, Despotovski (Tasevski 66), Sumulikoski, Georgievski (Grozdanovski 61), Pandev (Ibraimi 79), Naumoski (Ivanovski 58), Stojkov.
Spain: Reina (Diego Lopez 65) - Arbeloa, Puyol, Pique, Capdevila (Monreal 71), Xabi Alonso (Busquets 46), Cazorla (Fabregas 46), Xavi (Marchena 71), Silva, Villa (Riera 46), Fernando Torres (Guiza 64).

Aug 12 - Le Petit-Quevilly, France
Mali 3 (M Diallo 20, 35, Maiga 25)
Burkina Faso 0
HT: 3-0

Aug 12 - Valletta
Malta 2 (M Mifsud 64, 73)
Georgia 0
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Kailis (Cyp)
Malta: M Muscat (Hogg 46) - A Muscat, A Agius, Said, Azzopardi (Failla 60), Pace, Sammut (Briffa 60), G Agius (Fenech 90), Schembri (Woods 46), Cohen (S Bajada 83), M Mifsud.
Georgia: Lomaia - Kashia, Ghvinianidze (Gongadze 82), Tskitishvili (Devdariani 64), Khmaladze, Dvalishvili, Kenia, Khizanishvili, Seturidze (Merebashvili 68), Kobiashvili, Popkhadze (Sanaia 85).

Aug 12 - Podgorica
Montenegro 2 (Jovetic pen 31, Djalovic 45)
Wales 1 (Vokes 47)
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Mazic (Ser)
Montenegro: Poleksic (M Bozovic 46) - Dzudovic, Pavicevic, Batak (Pejovic 65), Jovanovic, Pekovic (Kascelan 59), Drincic, Vukcevic (Novakovic 80), V Bozovic (Nikolic 67), Jovetic, Djalovic (Beciraj 68).
Wales: Hennessey (Price 46) - Gunter, J Collins (Morgan 60), Gabbidon, Ricketts (Eardley 51), Williams (Nyatanga 46), Collison, Ramsey (Cotterill 69), Ledley, Church (Vokes 46), Earnshaw.

Aug 12 - Rabat
Morocco 1 (El Ahmadi 44)
Congo 1 (Moussilou 18)
HT: 1-1

Aug 12 - Maputo
Mozambique 1 (Miro 39)
Swaziland 0
HT: 1-0

Aug 12 - Belfast
Northern Ireland 1 (McCann 19)
Israel 1 (Barda 27)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 10,250. **Ref:** Valgeirsson (Ice)
Northern Ireland: Taylor (Tuffey 46) - Baird, Craigan, Hughes (McGinn 46), McCartney, Johnson (McAuley 46), Clingan (McGivern 70), McCann, Brunt (Davis 46), Healy (Paterson 59), Lafferty.
Israel: Awat (Davidovich 46) - Meshumar, Keinan (Ben Haim 46), Strul (Mori 71), Dayan, Cohen (Kayal 46), Baruchyan, Benayoun (Toama 54), Yadin (Ziv 65), Barda, Colautti.

Aug 12 - Salalah
Oman 2 (Rabia 47, 63)
Saudi Arabia 1 (Al Shamrani pen 90)
HT: 0-0

Aug 12 - Bydgoszcz
Poland 2 (Obraniak 47, 79)
Greece 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 19,000. **Ref:** Sagara (Jap)
Poland: Boruc - Wasilewski, Dudka, Zewlakow, Krzynowek, M Lewandowski, Murawski (Jodlowiec 75), Blaszczykowski (Saganowski 83), R Lewandowski (Pawel Brozek 54), Guerreiro (Lobodzinski 75), Smolarek (Obraniak 46).
Greece: Chalkias - Vyntra, Spyropoulos, Moras (Papadopoulos 53), Papastathopoulos (Kyrgiakos 46), Karagounis (Patsatzoglou 63), Katsouranis, Tziolis, Salpigidis (Gekas 46), Samaras, Haristeas (Amanatidis 46).

Aug 12 - Limerick
Republic of Ireland 0
Australia 3 (Cahill 38, 44, Carney 90)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 19,000. **Ref:** Perez Burrull (Spa)
Rep Ireland: Given (Westwood 68) - O'Shea, St Ledger, Dunne, Kilbane (Nolan 63), Duff (S Hunt 46), Whelan, Gibson (Andrews 63), McGeady (Long 82), Keane, K Doyle (Folan 46).
Australia: Schwarzer - Kisnorbo (Madaschi 46), North (Spiranovic 72), Williams, Carney, Jedinak (Holland 88), Cahill (Holman 46), Wilkshire, Bresciano (Carle 78), Kewell, McDonald (Rukavytsya 46).

Aug 12 - Moscow
Russia 2 (Semshov 17, Pavlyuchenko 78)
Argentina 3 (Aguero 45, Lopez 46, Datolo 59)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 28,800. **Ref:** De Bleeckere (Blg)
Russia: Akinfeev - Ignashevich, Anyukov, Kolodin (V Berezutsky 76), Yanbayev, Semshov (Pogrebnyak 82), Semak (Dzagoev 58), Denisov, Arshavin, Kerzhakov (Pavlyuchenko 46), Zyryanov.
Argentina: Andujar - Zanetti, Burdisso (Diaz 46), Otamendi (Papa 46), Heinze, M Rodriguez (Datolo 58), Mascherano, Bolatti (Battaglia 67), Gutierrez, D Milito (Lopez 46), Aguero (Lavezzi 62).

Aug 12 - Kigali
Rwanda 1 (Mwiseneza 68)
Tanzania 2 (Gumbo 59, Tegete 70)
HT: 0-0

Aug 12 - Singapore
Singapore 1 (Noh Alam Shah 7)
China 1 (Yang Hao 27)
HT: 1-1
China 4-3 on pens
Singapore: Sunny - Muhammad, Khaizan, Bennett, Sha'ban (Emuejeraye 74), Noh Alam Shah, Harun, Wilkinson (Nawaz 64), Sulaiman (Rahman 46), Ishak (Dickson 46), Duric.
China: Yang Zhi - Liu Jianye (Chen Lei 58), Du Wei, Zhao Peng, Rong Hao (Sun Xiang 80), Hao Junmin (Qu Bo 62), Yang Hao, Jiang Ning, Zhao Xuri (Liu Jindong 65), Zheng Long, Gao Lin (Deng Zhuoxiang 56).

Aug 12 - Atteridgeville
South Africa 1 (Mphela 90)
Serbia 3 (Tosic 58, 78, Lazovic 69)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Maillet (Sey)
South Africa: Khune (Fernandez 46) - Gaxa, A Mokoena (Khumalo 46), Booth, Masilela (Thwala 59), Sibaya, Dikgacoi (Mhlongo 82), Pienaar (Mashego 46), Modise, Van Heerden (Henyekane 74), Mphela.
Serbia: Stojkovic - Ivanovic, Subotic, Lukovic, Obradovic (Tomovic 88), Petrovic (Rukavina 74), Kacar (Kuzmanovic 46), Krasic (Tosic 46), Ninkovic (Milinkovic 83), Jovanovic (Lazovic 46), Zigic.

Aug 12 - Seoul
South Korea 1 (Park Chu-young 83)
Paraguay 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 22,631. **Ref:** Toma (Jap)
South Korea: Lee Woon-jae - Cho Yong-hyung, Lee Jung-soo, Oh Beom-seok (Kang Min-soo 46), Lee Young-pyo, Kim Jung-woo, Ki Sung-yeung, Kim Chi-woo (Cho Won-hee 46), Yeom Ki-hun (Lee Seung-hyun 69), Lee Keun-ho (Cho Dong-gun 61; Oh Jang-eun 88), Lee Dong-gook (Park Chu-young 46).
Paraguay: Villar - Alcaraz, J C Caceres (V Caceres 81), Caniza, M Caceres, Barreto (Ledesma 53), Riveros (Santana 65), Vera, Cabanas (O Cardozo 60), Haedo Valdez (Martinez 52), Benitez (Estigarribia 71).

Aug 12 - Stockholm
Sweden 1 (Elmander 42)
Finland 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 15,212. **Ref:** Fautrel (Fra)
Sweden: Gustafsson - M Nilsson, Mellberg, Majstorovic (P Hansson 46), Safari, S Larsson (Wilhelmsson 46), Kallstrom (Hysen 79), A Svensson (Wernbloom 46), Holmen (V Elm 46), Berg, Elmander (Toivonen 60).
Finland: Fredriksson - Lampi, Pasanen, Hyypia, Moisander, Porokara (Hamalainen 65), R Eremenko (Heikkinen 83), Litmanen (A Eremenko 46), Sparv (Tainio 83), Kolkka (Hetemaj 46), Forssell (Sadik 77).

Aug 12 - Basle
Switzerland 0
Italy 0
Att: 31,500. **Ref:** Kircher (Ger)
Switzerland: Benaglio - P Degen (Schwegler 68), Senderos, Grichting, Magnin (Ziegler 86), Padalino (Derdiyok 84), Inler, Fernandes, Barnetta (Vonlanthen 79), Frei (Yakin 68), Nkufo (Streller 68).
Italy: Buffon - Zambrotta (Santon 46), Cannavaro, Chiellini, Criscito, Camoranesi (Pepe 31), Pirlo (D'Agostino 60), Palombo, Marchisio (Grosso 72), Gilardino (Iaquinta 46), Rossi (Quagliarella 60).

Aug 12 - Sousse
Tunisia 0
Ivory Coast 0
Tunisia: Kasraoui - Souissi, Jemal (Mikari 46), Ghezal (Felhi 74), Hagui, Ragued, Korbi, Talder (Ben Saada 46), Khalfallah (Ghariani 64), Darragi (Allagui 79), Jemaa (Zitouni 68).
Ivory Coast: Barry - Eboue (Agorra 77), Tiene, Zokora, Bamba, Y Toure, N'Dri (Tiote 66), S Kalou (Kouassi 46), Demel (Meite 86), A Kone (Doumbia), B Kone (Cisse 68).

Aug 12 - Kiev
Ukraine 0
Turkey 3 (Tuncay 58, Servet 63, Hamit Altintop 65)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Ceferin (Sln)
Ukraine: Shovkovskyi - Mandziuk, Kucher, Rusol (Chygrynskyi 46), Shevchuk (Yarmash 46), Tymoshchuk, Hai (Nazarenko 46), Rotan, Kalinichenko (Husiev 46), Homeniuk (Milevskyi 46), Selezniov (Shevchenko 46).
Turkey: Volkan Demirel - Servet, Hakan Balta, Gokhan Gonul (Sabri 81), Gokhan Zan, Hamit Altintop, Nuri (Halil Altintop 83), Arda (Ismail 86), Tuncay (Kazim 69), Ayhan (Ceyhun 46), Nihat (Sercan 46).

Aug 12 - Bulawayo
Zimbabwe 1 (Zhokinyu 80)
Lesotho 1 (Motsweli pen 31)
HT: 0-1

a single shot on target as Slovenia eased to a 5-0 victory in their World Cup qualifier. Robert Koren (two), Aleksander Radosavljevic, Andraz Kirm and Zlatan Ljubijankic were on target for the hosts.

SOUTH AFRICA

Another three-goal loss

The World Cup hosts conceded three goals at home for a second successive game as they lost 3-1 to Serbia at the Super Stadium in Atteridgeville.

Manchester United's Zoran Tosic came on as a sub to score twice, with Danko Lazovic of PSV Eindhoven also on target. Katlego Mphela got a late consolation for South Africa, who lost 3-2 to Spain in the Confederations Cup last time out.

SPAIN

Fighting back

Having surrendered their 35-match unbeaten streak to USA in the Confederations Cup, the European champions survived a scare in Skopje and came back from 2-0 down at half-time to beat Macedonia.

Goran Pandev had put the hosts two up, before Vicente Del Bosque's side won the friendly with goals from Fernando Torres, Gerard Pique and Albert Riera.

1982 the last time second-placed CONCACAF side Honduras got to the World Cup finals

Comeback...Torres (left)

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Q (in tables) = qualified for finals

AFRICA

(6 finals places, one of which goes automatically to South Africa as hosts)

3rd stage

Group winners qualify for the finals

Group A

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gabon	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Togo	3	1	1	1	1	3	4
Morocco	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Cameroon	2	0	1	1	0	1	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Gabon-Cameroon
06.09.09 Togo-Morocco
09.09.09 Cameroon-Gabon
10.10.09 Cameroon-Togo
10.10.09 Gabon-Morocco
14.11.09 Morocco-Cameroon
14.11.09 Togo-Gabon

Group B

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tunisia	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Nigeria	3	1	2	0	3	0	5
Kenya	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Mozambique	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Remaining games

06.09.09 Mozambique-Kenya
06.09.09 Nigeria-Tunisia
10.10.09 Nigeria-Mozambique
10.10.09 Tunisia-Kenya
14.11.09 Kenya-Nigeria
14.11.09 Mozambique-Tunisia

Group C

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP C	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Algeria	3	2	1	0	5	1	7
Egypt	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
Zambia	3	1	1	1	2	3	4
Rwanda	3	0	1	2	0	4	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Rwanda-Egypt
06.09.09 Algeria-Zambia
10.10.09 Zambia-Egypt
11.10.09 Algeria-Rwanda
14.11.09 Egypt-Algeria
14.11.09 Rwanda-Zambia

Group D

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP D	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ghana	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Mali	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Benin	3	1	0	2	2	4	3
Sudan	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Remaining games

06.09.09 Benin-Mali
06.09.09 Ghana-Sudan
10.10.09 Mali-Sudan
11.10.09 Benin-Ghana
14.11.09 Ghana-Mali
14.11.09 Sudan-Benin

Group E

WC QUALS: AFRICA – 3RD STAGE – GROUP E	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ivory Coast	3	3	0	0	10	3	9
Burkina Faso	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Guinea	3	1	0	2	5	7	3
Malawi	3	0	0	3	1	8	0

Remaining games

05.09.09 Ivory Coast-Burkina Faso
05.09.09 Malawi-Guinea
10.10.09 Malawi-Ivory Coast
11.10.09 Guinea-Burkina Faso
14.11.09 Burkina Faso-Malawi
14.11.09 Ivory Coast-Guinea

ASIA

(4.5 finals places)

4th stage

Top two in each group qualified for the finals. The third-placed countries will meet in a play-off, the winners of which will meet New Zealand, the Oceania section winners, for a place in the finals

Group 1

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH STAGE – GP 1 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Australia (Q)	8	6	2	0	12	1	20
Japan (Q)	8	4	3	1	11	6	15
Bahrain	8	3	1	4	6	8	10
Qatar	8	1	3	4	5	14	6
Uzbekistan	8	1	1	6	5	10	4

Group 2

WC QUALS: ASIA – 4TH STAGE – GP 2 – FINAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
South Korea (Q)	8	4	4	0	12	4	16
North Korea (Q)	8	3	3	2	7	5	12
Saudi Arabia	8	3	3	2	8	8	12
Iran	8	2	5	1	8	7	11
UAE	8	0	1	7	6	17	1

Asian section play-off

05.09.09 Bahrain-Saudi Arabia
09.09.09 Saudi Arabia-Bahrain

Asia/Oceania play-off

10.10.09 Bahrain OR Saudi Arabia-New Zealand
14.11.09 New Zealand-Bahrain OR Saudi Arabia

CONCACAF

(3.5 finals places)

4th stage

Top three qualify for the finals. The fourth-placed country will meet the fifth-placed South American country for a place in the finals

Aug 12 - San Pedro Sula

Honduras 4 (Costly 31, 90, Pavon 51, M Valladares 89)
Costa Rica 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Rodriguez (Mex)
Honduras: N Valladares - Sabillon, Figueroa, O Chavez, E Izaguirre, Guevara, W Palacios, Turcios (Thomas 85), R Nunez (De Leon 60), Costly, Pavon (M Valladares 71).
Costa Rica: Navas (R Gonzalez 20) - Diaz, Wallace (Ledezma 62), Fernandez, Delgado, Centeno, Borges, Alonso, Sirias, Herron (Bolanos 43), Saborio.

Aug 12 - Mexico City

Mexico 2 (I Castro 19, Sabah 82)
United States 1 (Davies 9)
HT: 1-1. **Att:** 104,499. **Ref:** Moreno (Pan)
Mexico: G Ochoa - Osorio, Salcido, Magallon, Juarez, Dos Santos, I Castro, Torrado, Guardado (Castillo 71), Blanco (Vela 56), Franco (Sabah 79).
United States: Howard - Cherundolo, Onyewu, DeMerit, Bocanegra, Dempsey, Clark (Holden 58), Bradley, Donovan, Davies (Altidore 76), Ching (Feilhaber 58).

Aug 12 - Port of Spain

Trinidad & Tobago 1 (Glen 7)
El Salvador 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 16,000. **Ref:** Vaughn (USA)
Trinidad & Tobago: Ince - Leon (Birchall 63), Abu Bakr, K Williams, Lawrence, Noel, C Edwards, Daniel (Yorke 72), Spann, Glen (Scotland 83), Jones.
El Salvador: Montes - Marvin Gonzalez, Flores (Reyes 66), L Hernandez, Sanchez, Romero (Alvarez 46), Quintanilla, Zelaya, Salazar (Rudis Corrales 83), Umanzor, Castillo.

WC QUALS: CONCACAF – 4TH STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Costa Rica	6	4	0	2	9	9	12
Honduras	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
United States	6	3	1	2	11	8	10
Mexico	6	3	0	3	8	9	9
El Salvador	6	1	2	3	6	8	5
Trinidad & Tob	6	1	2	3	7	11	5

Remaining games

05.09.09 Costa Rica-Mexico
05.09.09 Honduras-Trinidad & Tob
05.09.09 United States-El Salvador
09.09.09 El Salvador-Costa Rica
09.09.09 Mexico-Honduras
09.09.09 Trinidad & Tob-United States
10.10.09 Costa Rica-Trinidad & Tob
10.10.09 Honduras-United States
10.10.09 Mexico-El Salvador
14.10.09 El Salvador-Honduras
14.10.09 Trinidad & Tob-Mexico
14.10.09 United States-Costa Rica

CONCACAF/South America play-off

14.11.09 4th-placed CONCACAF country-5th-placed South American country
18.11.09 5th-placed South American country-4th-placed CONCACAF country

EUROPE

(13 finals places)

Group winners qualify for the finals. The best eight runners-up* will meet in four head-to-head play-off ties, the winners of which will also qualify for the finals

**Determined by points gained against teams finishing first, third, fourth and fifth in the respective groups*

Group 1

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Denmark	6	5	1	0	13	2	16
Hungary	6	4	1	1	8	2	13
Portugal	6	2	3	1	8	4	9
Sweden	6	2	3	1	6	2	9
Albania	8	1	3	4	4	8	6
Malta	8	0	1	7	0	21	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Denmark-Portugal
05.09.09 Hungary-Sweden
09.09.09 Albania-Denmark
09.09.09 Hungary-Portugal
09.09.09 Malta-Sweden
10.10.09 Denmark-Sweden
10.10.09 Portugal-Hungary
14.10.09 Denmark-Hungary
14.10.09 Portugal-Malta
14.10.09 Sweden-Albania

Group 2

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Greece	6	4	1	1	12	4	13
Switzerland	6	4	1	1	11	6	13
Latvia	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
Israel	6	2	3	1	10	8	9
Luxembourg	6	1	1	4	3	13	4
Moldova	6	0	1	5	2	11	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Israel-Latvia
05.09.09 Moldova-Luxembourg
05.09.09 Switzerland-Greece
09.09.09 Israel-Luxembourg
09.09.09 Latvia-Switzerland
09.09.09 Moldova-Greece
10.10.09 Greece-Latvia
10.10.09 Israel-Moldova
10.10.09 Luxembourg-Switzerland
14.10.09 Greece-Luxembourg
14.10.09 Latvia-Moldova
14.10.09 Switzerland-Israel

SWITZERLAND

Hitzfeld to carry on

National coach Ottmar Hitzfeld has signed a two-year contract extension that will keep him in charge until June 2012. The 60-year-old former Bayern Munich boss, said: "I'm glad to be able to continue my work with the team and the entire staff. I'm convinced that we will qualify for South Africa 2010."

Beaten again...Sabah celebrates

USA

Barren run continues

The USA continued their woeful form on Mexican soil, where they lost for the 23rd time in 24 games, in the World Cup qualifier in Mexico City.

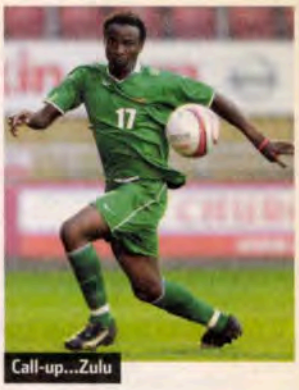
They led with a Charlie Davies goal before Mexico hit back through Israel Castro and Miguel Sabah. The only time USA have avoided defeat was a 0-0 draw in 1997.

ZAMBIA

Learning curve

Coach Herve Renard was forced to field three British-based students in the friendly against Ghana in London after several of his squad failed to get visas to enter the UK.

The trio – Lyson Zulu, Kabwe Kasase and Lengwe Kapotwe – were part of a side that were beaten 4-1.


Call-up...Zulu

Group 3

Aug 12 - Maribor

Slovenia 5 (Koren 19, 74, Radosavljevic 39, Kirm 54, Ljubijankic 90)
San Marino 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 6,500. **Ref:** Meckarovski (Mac)
Slovenia: S Handanovic - Brecko, Cesar, Suler, Jokic, Birsa, Koren, Radosavljevic (Bacinovic 74), Pecnik (Kirm 46), Ljubijankic, Velikonja (Novakovic 72).
San Marino: A Simoncini - Andreini, Bacciocchi, Della Valle, D Simoncini (Albani 66), F Vitaioli (M Vitaioli 59), Berretti, Bugli, Vannucci, Ciacci, Manuel Marani (Bonini 80).

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Slovakia	6	5	0	1	17	6	15
N Ireland	7	4	1	2	12	6	13
Slovenia	7	3	2	2	10	4	11
Poland	6	3	1	2	18	7	10
Czech Rep	6	2	2	2	6	4	8
San Marino	8	0	0	8	1	37	0

Remaining games

05.09.09 Poland-Northern Ireland
05.09.09 Slovakia-Czech Rep
09.09.09 Czech Rep-San Marino
09.09.09 Northern Ireland-Slovakia
09.09.09 Slovenia-Poland
10.10.09 Czech Rep-Poland
10.10.09 Slovakia-Slovenia
14.10.09 Czech Rep-Northern Ireland
14.10.09 Poland-Slovakia
14.10.09 San Marino-Slovenia

Group 4

Aug 12 - Baku

Azerbaijan 0
Germany 2 (Schweinsteiger 12, Klose 54)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 22,500. **Ref:** Kelly (Ire)
Azerbaijan: Veliyev - Melikov, Yunisoglu, Sadigov, Allahverdiyev, Shukurov, Chertoganov, Abbasov, Nadirov (Akhtyamov 75), Mammadov, Javadov.
Germany: Enke - Lahm, Mertesacker, Tasci, Schafer, Ballack, Hitzlsperger, Schweinsteiger, Trochowski (Jansen 77), Klose (Cacau 75), Gomez (Ozil 84).

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 4

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	7	6	1	0	20	4	19
Russia	6	5	0	1	12	3	15
Finland	6	3	1	2	8	10	10
Wales	7	3	0	4	5	7	9
Azerbaijan	6	0	1	5	0	7	1
Liechtenstein	6	0	1	5	1	15	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Azerbaijan-Finland
05.09.09 Russia-Liechtenstein
09.09.09 Germany-Azerbaijan
09.09.09 Liechtenstein-Finland
09.09.09 Wales-Russia
10.10.09 Finland-Wales
10.10.09 Liechtenstein-Azerbaijan
10.10.09 Russia-Germany
14.10.09 Azerbaijan-Russia
14.10.09 Germany-Finland
14.10.09 Liechtenstein-Wales

Group 5

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 5

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spain	6	6	0	0	13	2	18
Bosnia-Herz	6	4	0	2	18	7	12
Turkey	6	2	2	2	6	5	8
Belgium	6	2	1	3	10	11	7
Estonia	6	1	2	3	5	15	5
Armenia	6	0	1	5	3	15	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Armenia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
05.09.09 Spain-Belgium
05.09.09 Turkey-Estonia
09.09.09 Armenia-Belgium
09.09.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Turkey
09.09.09 Spain-Estonia
10.10.09 Armenia-Spain
10.10.09 Belgium-Turkey
10.10.09 Estonia-Bosnia-Herzegovina
14.10.09 Bosnia-Herzegovina-Spain
14.10.09 Estonia-Belgium
14.10.09 Turkey-Armenia

Group 6

Aug 12 - Minsk

Belarus 1 (Verkhovtsov 81)
Croatia 3 (Olic 22, 83, Eduardo 69)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 21,651. **Ref:** Brych (Ger)
Belarus: Zhevnov - Omelyanchuk, Verkhovtsov, Sosnovsky, Yurevich, Kalachev, Kulchy, Kashevsky (Kovel 54), Kutuzov (Blizniuk 85), A Hleb, Kornilenko (Rodionov 70).
Croatia: Runje - Corluka, Krizanac (Rakitic 46), Simunic, Pranjic, Srna, Modric, Vukojevic, Kranjcar (Mandzukic 66), Eduardo (Juric 88), Olic.

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 6

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
England	7	7	0	0	26	4	21
Croatia	7	4	2	1	15	7	14
Ukraine	6	3	2	1	9	6	11
Belarus	6	3	0	3	15	10	9
Kazakhstan	7	1	0	6	7	22	3
Andorra	7	0	0	7	2	25	0

Remaining games

05.09.09 Croatia-Belarus
05.09.09 Ukraine-Andorra
09.09.09 Andorra-Kazakhstan
09.09.09 Belarus-Ukraine
09.09.09 England-Croatia
10.10.09 Belarus-Kazakhstan
10.10.09 Ukraine-England
14.10.09 Andorra-Ukraine
14.10.09 England-Belarus
14.10.09 Kazakhstan-Croatia

Group 7

Aug 12 - Torshavn

Faroe Islands 0
France 1 (Gignac 42)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 2,974. **Ref:** Koukoulakis (Gre)
Faroe Islands: Mikkelsen - a Bo, Naes, Benjaminsen, Lokin, S Samuelsen, Holst (Edmundsson 28), Gregerssen, Davidsen, S Olsen (a Borg 85), Atli Danielsen (Jann Petersen 42).
France: Lloris - Escude, Sagna, Gallas, Evra, Malouda (Ribery 65), Gourcuff, L Diarra, Toulalan, Anelka, Gignac.

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 7

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Serbia	7	6	0	1	15	5	18
France	6	4	1	1	8	6	13
Lithuania	7	3	0	4	6	6	9
Austria	6	2	1	3	7	9	7
Romania	6	2	1	3	7	10	7
Faroe Islands	6	0	1	5	1	8	1

Remaining games

05.09.09 Austria-Faroe Islands
05.09.09 France-Romania
09.09.09 Faroe Islands-Lithuania
09.09.09 Romania-Austria
09.09.09 Serbia-France
10.10.09 Austria-Lithuania
10.10.09 France-Faroe Islands
10.10.09 Serbia-Romania
14.10.09 France-Austria
14.10.09 Lithuania-Serbia
14.10.09 Romania-Faroe Islands

Group 8

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 8

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italy	6	4	2	0	9	3	14
Rep Ireland	7	3	4	0	8	5	13
Bulgaria	6	1	5	0	6	4	8
Cyprus	6	1	2	3	6	9	5
Montenegro	6	0	4	2	5	8	4
Georgia	7	0	3	4	4	9	3

Remaining games

05.09.09 Bulgaria-Montenegro
05.09.09 Cyprus-Rep Ireland
05.09.09 Georgia-Italy
09.09.09 Italy-Bulgaria
09.09.09 Montenegro-Cyprus
10.10.09 Cyprus-Bulgaria
10.10.09 Montenegro-Georgia
10.10.09 Rep Ireland-Italy
14.10.09 Bulgaria-Georgia
14.10.09 Italy-Cyprus
14.10.09 Rep Ireland-Montenegro

Group 9

Aug 12 - Oslo

Norway 4 (J A Riise 36, Gamst Pedersen 45, 90, Huseklepp 60)
Scotland 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 24,493. **Ref:** Hamer (Lux)
Norway: Knudsen - Hogli, Waehler, Hangeland, J A Riise, B H Riise (Skjelbred 84), Grindheim, Hoseth, Gamst Pedersen, Huseklepp (Iversen 76), Carew (Helstad 84).
Scotland: Marshall - Hutton, G Caldwell, S Caldwell (McFadden 48), Davidson, G Alexander, D Fletcher, Commons, Brown, McCormack (Berra 37; Whittaker 78), K Miller. *Sent off: G Caldwell 34min.*

WC QUALS: EUROPE – GROUP 9

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland (Q)	7	7	0	0	16	2	21
Macedonia	6	2	1	3	4	7	7
Scotland	6	2	1	3	4	10	7
Norway	6	1	3	2	6	5	6
Iceland	7	1	1	5	6	12	4

Remaining games

05.09.09 Iceland-Norway
05.09.09 Scotland-Macedonia
09.09.09 Norway-Macedonia
09.09.09 Scotland-Holland

Play-off dates

1st legs - 14.11.09; 2nd legs - 18.11.09

OCEANIA

(0.5 finals places)

2nd stage

As group winners, New Zealand will meet the fifth-best Asian country for a place in the finals

WC QUALS: OCEANIA – 2ND STAGE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
New Zealand	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
New Caledonia	6	2	2	2	12	10	8
Fiji	6	2	1	3	8	11	7
Vanuatu	6	1	1	4	5	13	4

Asia/Oceania play-off

10.10.09 Bahrain OR Saudi Arabia-New Zealand
14.11.09 New Zealand-Bahrain OR Saudi Arabia

SOUTH AMERICA

(4.5 finals places)

Top four qualify for the finals. The fifth-placed country will meet the fourth-placed CONCACAF country for a place in the finals

WC QUALS: SOUTH AMERICA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	14	7	6	1	25	6	27
Chile	14	8	2	4	23	14	26
Paraguay	14	7	3	4	20	13	24
Argentina	14	6	4	4	19	15	22
Ecuador	14	5	5	4	18	20	20
Uruguay	14	4	6	4	23	16	18
Colombia	14	4	5	5	7	11	17
Venezuela	14	5	2	7	17	24	17
Bolivia	14	3	3	8	19	30	12
Peru	14	1	4	9	7	29	7

Remaining games

05.09.09 Argentina-Brazil
05.09.09 Chile-Venezuela
05.09.09 Colombia-Ecuador
05.09.09 Paraguay-Bolivia
05.09.09 Peru-Uruguay
09.09.09 Bolivia-Ecuador
09.09.09 Brazil-Chile
09.09.09 Paraguay-Argentina
09.09.09 Uruguay-Colombia
09.09.09 Venezuela-Peru
10.10.09 Argentina-Peru
10.10.09 Bolivia-Brazil
10.10.09 Colombia-Chile
10.10.09 Ecuador-Uruguay
10.10.09 Venezuela-Paraguay
14.10.09 Brazil-Venezuela
14.10.09 Chile-Ecuador
14.10.09 Paraguay-Colombia
14.10.09 Peru-Bolivia
14.10.09 Uruguay-Argentina

CONCACAF/South America play-off

14.11.09 4th-placed CONCACAF country-5th-placed South American country
18.11.09 5th-placed South American country-4th-placed CONCACAF country

Champions...Mexico gained revenge for their 2007 Gold Cup Final defeat by USA

INTERNATIONALS Mexico back on top

GOLD CUP

MEXICO thrashed USA 5-0 in the Final in New York to claim their first Gold Cup since 2003, and the Tricolor did so with a B squad featuring mostly youth players and only two Europe-based professionals: Carlos Vela and Giovani Dos Santos.

It was a similar story for USA, whose squad contained only four players from the one that reached the Final of the Confederations Cup – Freddy Adu, Charlie Davies, Heath Pearce and Luis Robles – as well as seven uncapped players and only six with more than 10 caps.

USA, winners in three of the last four competitions, once again enjoyed home advantage until the Final, which was played in front of a pro-Mexican crowd of 79,196 in Giants stadium, New York. USA enjoyed wins over Honduras and Grenada in Group B but needed Stuart Holden's last-minute, long-range equaliser to claim a point from a 2-2 draw with Haiti in their final group game.

In Group C, Mexico opened with a comfortable 2-0 win over Nicaragua but then ran into controversy in their second game against Panama. Mexico coach Javier Aguirre clashed with Panama midfielder Ricardo Phillips 10 minutes from the end of their 1-1 draw, when he left his technical area and stuck his foot out in front of the player just as the ball crossed the touchline.

Aguirre was handed a three-match touchline ban and only returned for the Final, by which time Mexico had beaten Haiti comfortably in the quarter-finals and Costa Rica on penalties in the semis. Froylan Ledezma, scorer of Costa Rica's equalizer in a 1-1 draw, was the only player to miss a spot-kick in the shoot-out.

Costa Rica, leaders of the region's World Cup qualifying section, had earlier thrashed Guadaloupe 5-1 in the quarter-finals.

Canada made a promising start to the tournament, with 1-0 wins over Jamaica and El Salvador – both with goals by Toronto FC striker Ali Gerba – and topped Group A, but they were beaten 1-0 by Honduras in the quarter-finals.

USA were taken into extra time by Panama in the quarter-finals, then beat Honduras 2-0 in the semis.

In the Final, Giovani and Vela were outstanding in Mexico's 5-0 rout and all five goals came in a frenetic second half. Mexico captain Gerardo Torrado scored the first from the penalty spot after Giovani had been hauled down. Giovani then added a second before setting up Vela for the third. Jose Antonio Castro and Guillermo Franco completed the humiliation.

John Holmesdale

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

MEXICO maintained their momentum over USA by winning a crucial World Cup qualifier in Mexico City less than three weeks after their Gold Cup success.

USA took the lead in the ninth minute when Charlie Davies finished a counter-attack to slot home at the far post. However, Mexico drew level when Israel Castro's long-range shot crashed in off the crossbar, then substitute Miguel Sabah struck to give Mexico victory late in the game.

Mexico thus maintained their strong home form in the qualifiers and gave themselves hope of reaching the finals in South Africa after their poor start.

They remain in fourth place in the CONCACAF qualifying section, but are now only one point behind USA and Honduras, and three points behind the leaders, Costa Rica, who they play next. Costa Rica were surprisingly beaten 4-0 by Honduras in their latest qualifier. Honduras striker Carlo Costly maintained his excellent form with two goals.

In Europe, Norway opened up the race for second place in qualifying group 9 with a 4-0 win over Scotland in Oslo with goals from John Arne Riise, Morten Gamst Pedersen (two) and Erik Huseklepp. The Scots dropped to third, behind Macedonia on goal difference. Holland have already qualified as group winners.

John Holmesdale

Double delight...Carlos Pavon scores Honduras' second goal against Costa Rica

EUROPE Big guns slip up in qualifiers

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

THE EARLY qualifying rounds of the competition claimed some well-known casualties as teams who had previously competed in the group stages missed out this time.

For the second consecutive season Sparta Prague lost to Panathinaikos in the third qualifying round. Sparta looked set to progress after winning the first leg 3-1 in Prague, where new Panathinaikos striker Djibril Cisse missed a penalty. But in the return leg in Athens, Panathinaikos hit back 3-0 – a late goal by Dimitris Salpigidis confirming a 4-3 aggregate win.

Slavia Prague had been similarly confident after drawing 0-0 with Sheriff Tiraspol in Moldova, and Adam Hlousek's early goal in the home leg looked like settling it – until Brazilian defender Jose Nadson grabbed an unlikely equaliser in the last few seconds of injury time to send Sheriff through on away goals.

There was also injury-time disappointment for former England manager Steve McClaren, whose Twente side went out on away goals to a dramatic late strike from Sporting Lisbon. After a goalless first leg in Portugal, Twente took an early lead in the return leg and were ahead until the 93rd minute, when Sporting keeper Rui Patricio went forward for a corner and his header was deflected in by Twente defender Peter Wisgerhof.

Shakhtar Donetsk, winners of the last UEFA Cup, dropped into the new Europa League after losing on away goals to Romania's Timisoara. Shakhtar salvaged a 2-2 draw from the first game, courtesy of midfielder Fernandinho's late equaliser. But in the second leg, a defensive-minded Timisoara held out for a 0-0 draw.

Serbian champions Partizan Belgrade, having thrashed Welsh champions Rhyl 12-0 on aggregate in the second qualifying round, could not overcome a 2-0 loss to Cypriot champions APOEL Nicosia in the first leg of the third qualifying round. Almami Moreira gave Partizan an early lead in the return leg, but they failed to add a second goal and went out.

Missing... Lubos Kalouda fails to score and Sparta Prague make their exit

Beaten...Falkirk defence are outrun by Vaduz's Franz Burgmeier

The early qualifying rounds of the Champions League saw some surprises and a host of big-name casualties

Dynamo Moscow had been in a strong position to progress after beating Celtic 1-0 in Glasgow in the first leg of their third qualifying round. But goals in the last minute of each half, from Scott McDonald and substitute Georgios Samaras, gave Celtic a surprise victory in Russia.

The most comprehensive victory of the round was achieved by Anderlecht, who thrashed Turkish newcomers Sivasspor 5-0 in Brussels before the Turks recovered some respect with a 3-1 victory in the return.

In the previous round, Swedish champions Kalmar lost on away goals to Hungary's Debrecen, while Poland's Wisla Krakow were surprisingly beaten 2-1 on aggregate by Estonian champions Levadia Tallinn.

John Holmesdale

EUROPA CUP

There were poor results for Sweden's clubs in this new competition, with IFK Gothenburg beaten 4-2 on aggregate by Hapoel Tel Aviv and Helsingborgs losing on penalties to Sarajevo.

Scottish clubs also fared badly as Motherwell were soundly beaten 6-1 on aggregate by Steaua Bucharest, Aberdeen were thrashed 8-1 by Sigma Olomouc and Falkirk lost 2-1 to Vaduz of Liechtenstein.

Portuguese sides Braga and Pacos Ferreira also went out, losing to Elfsborg and Tel Aviv side Bnei Yehuda respectively.

St Patrick's Athletic of the Republic of Ireland enjoyed a momentous away-goals win in Russia against Krylya Sovetov Samara, who had raced to a 3-0 lead in the second leg before conceding two late goals.

Meanwhile, there were big aggregate wins for Galatasaray (10-1 over Maccabi Netanya), Roma (10-2 over Gent), Fulham (6-0 over Vetra) and Sturm Graz (7-1 over Petrovac).

In the second qualifying round, Norway's Rosenborg surprisingly lost to Karabakh of Azerbaijan, while Anorthosis Famagusta, who enjoyed success in last season's Champions League group stage, fell to Montenegro's Petrovac.

John Holmesdale

ASIA Champions Gamba crash out

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

WHILE there will definitely be one Japanese club in the semi-finals of this year's Asian Champions League, the chances of a home side taking part in November's showpiece Final in Tokyo have been whittled down significantly.

J.League duo Kawasaki Frontale and Nagoya Grampus meet in the quarter-finals for a place in the last four, but they are the only Japanese teams left in the competition.

Frontale reached the quarter-finals – matching their previous best performance in the tournament – by eliminating defending champions Gamba Osaka.

Masaru Kurotsu scored five minutes from time to give Frontale a 3-2 win in Osaka as Gamba, who have been suffering from injury problems and stuttering in the league recently, allowed a half-time lead to slip.

"It's a great shame," said Gamba coach Akira Nishino. "We had some of our regular players back and they did better than I expected.

"We worked hard and I thought we played well at times and showed our brand of football to some degree. But we started losing our movement and rhythm in the second half and that's when we gave up the goals."

Nishino, however, did not spare himself a share of the blame, adding: "I made mistakes tactically and took too long before making substitutions."

Frontale will now take on a Grampus side that eliminated twice continental champions Suwon Bluewings, beating Cha Bum-kun's South Koreans 2-1.

"It was as tough a game as I had expected," said Grampus coach Dragan Stojkovic. "But the important thing is that we got the victory and it will give us a lot of confidence."

There was better news for the South Korean contingent elsewhere, however, as FC Seoul accounted for J.League champions Kashima Antlers – they won 5-4 on penalties after drawing 2-2 at the end of extra time – while Pohang Steelers hammered Australia's Newcastle Jets 6-0, with midfielder Choi Hyo-jin hitting a hat-trick as he and Brazilian striker Denilson tormented Gary Van Egmond's thoroughly-outclassed A-League side.

FC Seoul will now take on Umm Salal after the Qatari side shocked Saudi Arabian powerhouse Al Hilal to reach the last eight. Pohang will meet moneybags Uzbekistan club Bunyodkor, who are now coached by former Brazil, Portugal and Chelsea boss Luiz Felipe Scolari. The 60-year-old Brazilian joined the Tashkent-based side in July as the replacement for compatriot Zico.

However, it was interim coach Amet Memet who oversaw Bunyodkor's 1-0 win over Iran's Persepolis – whose coach Nelo Vingada stood down afterwards – in the previous round in Tehran, which came by virtue of a penalty from World Cup-winning Brazil star Rivaldo.

Pakhtakor, Uzbekistan's other participant in the competition, will also feature in the quarter-finals after they saw off Saudi Arabia's Al Ettifaq to set up a clash with twice Asian club champions Al Ittihad.

Saudi side Ittihad sealed their spot in the quarter-finals by fighting back from going a goal down to beat compatriots Al Shabab 2-1. Afterwards they handed Argentinian coach Gabriel Calderon a new contract.

"Even after Al Shabab went ahead, I had a feeling that we would win," said Calderon. "You could see the players' desire and they never let up throughout."

The first legs of the quarter-finals will be played on September 23-24, with the return matches a week later.

Michael Church

We're on our way...Kengo Nakamura scores for Frontale against Gamba

Top shot...FC Seoul's Ki Sung-yeung (out of picture) equalises against Kashima Antlers

"I made some tactical mistakes and took too long before making substitutions"

Gamba Osaka coach Akira Nishino holds up his hands

PEOPLE in the news

Salgado swaps Bernabeu for Blackburn

Quadruple winner...Salgado

EUROPE

MICHEL SALGADO ended a decade at Real Madrid when he was released by mutual consent and joined Blackburn Rovers. Among numerous trophies, the 33-year-old defender won four Spanish championships and two Champions Leagues during his time at the Bernabeu.

Former Belarus coach YURI KURNENIN, who led the Under-21s to the European Championship finals in June, died at the age of 55.

Former Holland striker JIMMY FLOYD HASSELBAINK announced his retirement. The 36-year-old, who won 23 caps and played for Leeds, Chelsea and Atletico Madrid among others, turned down offers to play in the Middle East and said he wants to be a coach.

Gala buy...Elano

Brazilian international ELANO joined Galatasaray from Manchester City, who also allowed Bulgarian VALERI BOJINOV to move to newly-promoted Parma on loan.

Brazil striker NILMAR joined Spain's Villarreal from Internacional of Porto Alegre for a transfer fee of around £8.6million. The 25-year-old previously played in Europe, in 2004-05, for Lyon.

Promising young striker MARKO ARNAUTOVIC joined Internazionale on a year-long loan from Dutch side Twente. With Inter concerned about Arnautovic's fitness, the deal will be made permanent if the 20-year-old Austrian manages to complete 10 or more appearances for the Italian champions.

New start...Hoffer

Austrian international striker ERWIN HOFFER joined Napoli from Rapid Wien for a fee reported to be around £4.5m.

Former Germany keeper JENS LEHMANN will retire at the end of the season. The 39-year-old joined Stuttgart from Arsenal in 2008.

Spain striker FERNANDO MORIENTES joined Marseille from Valencia. Morientes played the 2003-04 season in France for Monaco.

Ajax signed Holland international midfielder DEMY DE ZEEUW from champions AZ Alkmaar for £6.5m.

RODRIGO PALACIO joined Italian club Genoa from Boca Juniors. The 27-year-old striker scored 82 goals in 185 games for the Argentinian side.

BILLY McNEILL, captain of Celtic's 1967 European Cup-winning side and a former manager of the Scottish club, has been given a seat for life in the presidential box at Celtic Park and appointed as a club ambassador.

Uruguay defender MARTIN CACERES joined Juventus on a season-long loan from Barcelona. The 22-year-old joined Barca from Villarreal in summer 2008 but struggled with injuries last season. Juve were reported to have agreed an option allowing them to sign Caceres on a permanent basis for around £10m.

Juve deal...Caceres

AMERICAS

Former Argentina captain JUAN PABLO SORIN retired at the age of 33. The left-back, who was capped 76 times and won the Libertadores with River Plate in 1996, had been plagued with injuries during his third spell with Brazilian side Cruzeiro. He also had spells with Argentinos Juniors, Juventus, Lazio, Barcelona, Paris Saint-Germain, Villarreal and Hamburg.

Farewell...Sorin

DIEGO UMANA resigned as coach of America after his team lost the local derby to Deportivo Cali.

AFRICA

Tunisia striker MOHAMMED SELLITI joined Egyptian club Ismaili from Stade Tunisien.

Former Bulgaria striker HRISTO STOICHKOV was named coach of Mamelodi Sundowns in South Africa.

Egypt's Zamalek signed striker MIDO on loan from Middlesbrough for a year. The 26-year-old played for clubs in Belgium, Holland, Spain, France and Italy, as well as England.

On the move...Mido

CROATIA PRVA HNL 2009-10

The big two...Ilija Sivonjic of Dinamo Zagreb takes on Hajduk Split's Anthony Seric (left) and Josip Skoko (right)

KEY DATES

Season starts July 24, 2009
Mid-season break December 5, 2009 to February 19, 2010
Season ends May 16, 2010

THE newly expanded Croatian championship (which has grown from 12 to 16 teams) was branded a failure even before it got underway, with critics convinced that a number of clubs will go bankrupt before the end of the season, and the second division having to start with just 13 clubs as a number of teams failed to meet UEFA licensing criteria.

One of the arguments for the increased number of clubs put forward by the league's president, Igor Stimac, was that it would provide more opportunities for young Croatian players to experience top-flight football.

However, with the Croatian Football Federation also upping the number of foreign players allowed from four to six, home-grown talent has been squeezed out even more in some situations.

Last year's runners-up **Hajduk Split**, for example, snapped up two young Brazilians on loan from Gremio – defender Thiaguinho and striker Rafael Paraiba – Nigerian striker Isah Eliakwu arrived from Triestina in Italy, Uruguayan striker Richard Porta joined from Siena and Romania midfielder Florin Cernat turned a previous loan from Dynamo Kyiv into a permanent deal.

Reigning Champions **Dinamo Zagreb** are no better off, with last season's imports – Brazilians Etto, Sammir and Carlos, Argentinians Adrian Calello and Luis Ibanez, Chilean Pedro Morales, Cameroonian Mathias Chago and Czech Miroslav Slepicka, being joined by Albanian Emiljano Vila and Greek Dimitrios Papadopoulus.

Dinamo's executive manager Zdravko Mamic believes his side will win their fifth successive championship, while Hajduk president Mate Peros claims his side will be even stronger this season, despite the sale of Nikola Kalinic to Blackburn Rovers.

Dinamo and Hajduk will surely dominate the championship race once again, and it's a two-horse race that no one else can keep up with.

Of the likely chasing pack behind them, **Slaven Belupo** have brought in Csaba Csizmadia from Grosseto of Italy, while **Rijeka** went further afield to sign Johann Smith from Toronto FC and Jonathan Germano of Argentinian side Estudiantes.

Both of those sides went out in the Europa League in the third qualifying round, along with Hajduk. **Osijek** and **Sibenik** hopes of challenging for a European place this time around will have been dented by the sales of Valentin Babic to Gyor of Hungary and Josip Bonacin to Romanian second-tier side Unirea Alba Iulia respectively, while **Cibalia** have recruited Dino Kresinger from Slaven Belupo and **Varteks** signed Ivan Jolic from Interblock of Slovenia.

Inter Zapresic, **NK Zagreb** and **Zadar** will be focusing more on the other end of the table, where those battling to stay up will include **Croatia Sesvete** and all four clubs that came up from the second tier.

Of that quartet, **Istra 1961**, **Karlovac** and **Medimurje** have all rejected Stimac's vision of clubs fielding young Croatians by employing older, more experienced players in their attempts to stay up, while **Lokomotiva** from Zagreb are basically Dinamo's second team – which further makes a nonsense of the league's expansion.

Zdravko Reic

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/croatia

Critics of the newly-expanded league are convinced that a number of clubs will go bankrupt before the end of the season

Arrival...Varteks' new signing Jolic

POLAND EKSTRAKLASA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Mid-season break November 30, 2009 to February 27, 2010
Season ends May 15, 2010

DESPITE their surprise elimination from the second qualifying round of the Champions League by Levadia Tallinn in July, **Wisla Krakow** remain the dominant force in Polish football.

The defending champions – who have won seven titles and two domestic cups since billionaire cable-factory owner Boguslaw Cupial bought the club in 1998 – will be most people's favourites to claim the league crown once more.

After winning the Polish Cup last season, and beating Wisla in the Super Cup at the start of this one, **Lech Poznan** will fancy their chances of a first league title since 1993. And even though they lost key midfielder Rafal Murawski to Rubin Kazan of Russia in the summer, their current squad looks strong.

Last season's runners-up **Legia Warsaw** traditionally have huge aspirations and are among the title candidates. They will miss the injured Zimbabwe forward Takesure Chinyama, who was the league's top scorer last term, but ex-international striker Marcin Mieciel has returned from Bochum after eight years out of the country to replace him.

Jacek Grembocki will be hoping to take **Polonia Warsaw** into the European competition places once again. However, if he doesn't manage it he could soon be on his way as controversial club owner Jozef Wojciechowski has a reputation for sacking coaches: he's hired and fired eight in three years.

There's a new owner at **Slask Wroclaw** and TV magnate Zygmunt Solorz-Zak is hoping to bring a little bit more stability to a club who finished sixth last time out. As a demonstration of the club's new long-term vision, coach Ryszard Tarasiewicz has renewed his contract until 2012.

Lechia Gdansk have also been sold, with prime minister Donald Tusk's favourite team now owned by Andrzej Kuchar, who is a former coach of the national basketball team.

GKS Belchatow are a small-town club who regularly punch above their weight due to solid finances and the leadership of the national team's assistant coach, Rafal Ulatowski.

As one of the poorer clubs in the top flight, **Polonia Bytom** exceeded everyone's expectations by finishing seventh last season but they may find things somewhat harder this time.

Injured...Legia Warsaw will miss the goals of striker Chinyama (left)

With a national record of 14 titles – the last of which was in 1989 – **Ruch Chorzow** were the first Polish club to be listed on the stock exchange. But this has not failed to stop them having serious financial problems of late and the team must try to ignore an unsettling atmosphere of unpaid salaries.

After beating Wisla Krakow in the Super Cup, Lech Poznan will fancy their chances of a first league title since 1993

Backed by a huge copper consortium, which allowed them to open a new stadium this year, **Zaglebie Lubin** were champions in 2007, relegated in 2008 because of their involvement in a match-fixing scandal, then straight back up to the Ekstraklasa after one season.

Korona Kielce finished third in the Polish First League last season, but two weeks before the start of the new campaign they went up to the top flight after the Polish FA relegated Widzew Lodz for match fixing.

Although they were not punished with relegation, **Jagiellonia Bialystok** were also involved in a corruption scandal and as a result they started the season with a 10-point penalty.

Arka Gdynia fought a desperate battle to beat the drop last term and can expect more of the same again, as can **Piast Gliwice**, who survived their debut season in the top flight last term and will now be hoping to emulate **Odra Wodzislaw**, a team from a small town in the south of the country who were promoted for the first time in 1996 and have stayed there ever since.

Finally, **Cracovia Krakow**, who were relegated last season but reinstated when LKS Lodz failed to get a licence, will find life difficult once again as they must now play their home matches 53 miles away in Sosnowiec due to rebuilding work at their own stadium.

Dariusz Kurowski

Goal getter...Tomasz Bandrowski (no6) helped Lech Poznan to beat Fredrikstad in this season's Europa League

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/poland

UKRAINE PREMIER LEAGUE 2009-10

KEY DATES

Mid-season break December 13, 2009 to February 26, 2010
Season ends May 9, 2010

REIGNING champions **Dynamo Kyiv** are favourites to prolong their domestic league monopoly for another year after recruiting Russian manager Valery Gazzaev on a three-year deal. The Russian, who surprisingly replaced his countryman and friend Yuri Semin, has vowed not only to win the UPL title but also reach the Final of the Champions League during his time at the club.

Club owner Ihor Surkis says the signing of Gazzaev was the club's best deal of the transfer window. "Gazzaev was recommended by Semin himself," reveals Surkis. "He is a very authoritative coach who can do a good job for us. It is also our club policy to hire a Russian-speaking coach because nearly all our players, even foreigners, have to speak Russian."

Gazzaev, who worked well with Brazilian players during his time at CSKA Moscow, continued his interest in South Americans by signing 22-year-old defender Leandro Almeida from Atletico Mineiro and midfielder Gerson Magrao from Cruzeiro.

And Dynamo have not given up hope of re-signing their most famous old boy, Andriy Shevchenko, from Chelsea, with his old partner Serhiy Rebrov already back at the club as coach of the reserves.

Among those who have left are last season's top scorer Ismael Bangoura, who has joined Rennes in France, and Uzbekistan striker Maxim Shatskikh, who has gone to Lokomotiv Astana of Kazakhstan.

Dynamo's main rivals will, once again, be last season's UEFA Cup winners

Staying...Rat at Shakhtar Donetsk

New coach...Gazzaev (left) takes over at Dynamo Kyiv from Semin

Shakhtar Donetsk, who will be playing at the new Donbass Arena. Coach Mircea Lucescu, who suffered a heart attack at a pre-season training camp in Switzerland, says the league title will be the priority this term "because it gives us the direct entry to the Champions League group stage".

The club's billionaire owner Rinat Akhmetov was extremely busy during the summer, beating off interest in his best players after their European success. He calmly withstood an incredible £16million offer from Barcelona for international defender Dmytro Chyhrynskiy, while Croatia's Darijo Srna was persuaded to stay with the club by the offer of a new seven-year contract with an annual salary of £3m and the post of sports director when he retires.

Romania defender Razvan Rat and Brazilian midfielders Jadson and Fernandinho also opted to stay. Karpaty Lviv defender Vasyl Kobin was the only new face, though Nigeria forward Julius Aghahowa returned as a free agent from Turkish club Kayserispor.

Metalist Kharkiv confirmed their status as the country's third strongest club by finishing third for the third season running and reaching the last 16 in the UEFA Cup. Oligarch owner Oleksandr Yaroslavsky spent lavishly in the summer, signing Argentinian midfielder Hernan Fredes on loan from Independiente, Finland forward Alexei Eremenko from Saturn of Russia and promising attacker Volodymyr Lysenko on loan from Dynamo Kyiv. The experienced Oleh Shelayev of Kryvbas and Serhiy Pshenychnykh from Karpaty Lviv will reinforce the midfield, while Georgia Under-21 Vakhtang Pantskhava, on loan from Le Mans, will offer wide options in attack. In addition, coach Myron Markevych has pledged his future to the club until 2013.

Metalurh Donetsk, controlled by Ukraine's leading steel producer, Industrial Union of Donbass, will be in contention for a Europa League place. Bulgarian manager Nikolay Kostov received a confidence boost when his contract was extended for two more seasons and he has signed skilful Oleksiy Hodin from Metalurh Zaporizhya and powerful Zimbabwe striker Musawengosi Mguni from UAE side Al-Shabab.

Dynamo Kyiv haven't given up hope of bringing Shevchenko home from Chelsea

Dnipro Dnipropetrovsk are one of the country's richer clubs and their new signings include Czech goalkeeper Jan Lastuvka, Mexico's Nery Castillo and international forward Yevhen Seleznyov – all from Shakhtar. Other useful purchases include Cameroon midfielder Paul Essola from Arsenal Kyiv and Yevhen Cheberyachko from FC Kharkiv.

A complete lack of signings is likely to have a negative effect on **Vorskla Poltava**, who depleted their starting line-up by allowing Croat midfielder Denis Glavina to join Dinamo Zagreb on loan.

Arsenal Kyiv are confident of a mid-table finish after signing a pair of quality forwards from Dnipro in former international Andriy Vorobey and Romania's Ionut Mazilu.

Karpaty Lviv have been reinforced by the arrival of goalkeeper Bohdan Shust and defender Artem Fedetskyi, both from Shakhtar, and the return of the Brazilian forward William Batista from Baku of Azerbaijan.

Metalurh Zaporizhya normally rely on youth academy graduates, but they surprised everyone by signing two South Koreans, Kim Pyun-grae and Hwang Hun-hee.

Tavriya have held onto their best players so should be safe from relegation, while **Chornomorets** may struggle after failing to make any major signings.

Newcomers **Obolon** will rely on the group of promising players loaned to them by Dynamo Kyiv. Their coach, former international Yury Maksymov, also signed experienced midfielder Andriy Konushenko from Metalist and Valeriy Ivaschenko from Metalurh Zaporizhya.

Kryvbas improved their chances of staying up by signing experienced former Ukraine goalkeeper Vyacheslav Kernozenko from Dnipro and Lithuania midfielder Kestutis Ivaskevicius from Kaunas. **Illichivets Mariupol** signed promising midfielder Kostiantyn Yaroshenko from Shakhtar and now look like a more stable club who should have a chance of staying up. Meanwhile, last season's First League champions **Zakarpattia Uzhorod** could struggle, along with **Zorya Luhansk**.

Oleg Zadernovsky

For fixtures go to
www.worldsoccer.com/fixtures/ukraine

ALBANIA SUPERLIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

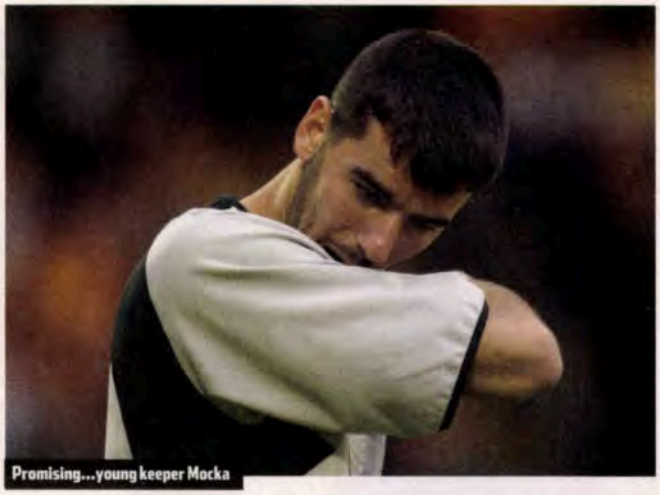
Season starts **August 23, 2009**
Season ends **May 2010**

DESPITE attempts to change the league set-up in order to return three of the country's bigger clubs to the top flight following their relegation last season, the new campaign kicked off with the same 12-team format as before – leaving Partizani (title winners 15 times), Elbasani (champions twice) and Lushnja (representing one of Albania's largest cities) in the second tier.

Reigning champions **KF Tirana** will again be the team to beat, even though Croatian coach Ilija Loncarevic's team has been weakened by the loss of international defender Ansi Agolli, captain Devis Mukaj remains optimistic and claims: "I'm sure we are still the best team in Albania and we will defend again our crown."

Pushing them all the way will be last year's runners-up **Vllaznia**, who will be reliant on a number of players who have been promoted from the youth team, and **Dinamo Tirana**, who have signed national team players Endrit Vrapi from Elbasani and Bekim Kuli from Besa.

Having sold Emiljano Vila to Dinamo Zagreb for £250,000 – which is the highest fee ever received by an Albanian club – **Teuta** have money to strengthen if they wish. **Besa** have already done that, with former Partizani coach Shpetim Duro bringing goalkeeper Orges Shehu and the veteran midfielder Paulin Dhembi from his old side.


Promising...young keeper Mocka

Last season's Albanian Cup winners **Flamurtari** can call on Albania Under-21s such as keeper Shpetim Mocka, defender Franc Veliu, midfielder Hair Zeqiri and forward Odise Roshi, and president Shpetim Gjika says: "This will be our season. We have the potential to challenge for the title because our boys are now much more experienced."

Having sold Emiljano Vila for the highest fee ever received by an Albanian club, Teuta have money to strengthen

For the first time ever, four clubs were promoted at the end of last season and all will be hoping to consolidate this term.

First Division winners **Laci** have some ambitious sponsors but also some violent supporters, while runners-up and former champions **Skenderbeu** return after just one season.

Kastrioti, who will rely on loan signings from the bigger clubs in nearby Tirana, came up through the play-offs with **Gramozi**, who are making their debut in the top flight thanks to the backing of Rezart Taci, one of the richest people in the country, who has vowed: "I'm sure we will win the Albanian Cup and challenge for a place amongst the five best placed teams."

Meanwhile **Shkumbini**, who lost their biggest sponsor in the summer, and **Apolonia**, who avoided the drop on the last week of last season, will be hoping to avoid the bottom two spots.

Gezim Nushi

For fixtures go to
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SLOVENIA PRVALIGA 2009-10

KEY DATES

Mid-season break **December 6, 2009 to February 19, 2010**
Season ends **May 2010**

FINALLY, after a five-year absence due to insolvency, **Olimpija** – the country's most popular club – are back in the top flight after winning the Slovenian Second League last season.

However, ongoing internal rows resulted in a player-led boycott of the Dragons' penultimate match last season and the team started the new campaign having been deducted two points. Many of those players who had stuck by the Ljubljana club after they were relegated left in the summer with Miran Pavlin, Amir Karic and Robert Volk all going to Koper, while Ales Ceh joined Drava.

Matters got worse when new coach Branko Oblak had his contract terminated after a poor start to the season. His assistant, Safet Hadzic, was appointed caretaker and faces a tough job with a squad made up mostly of youngsters.

Reigning champions **Maribor** are clear favourites to win the title under the controversial, former international Zlatko Zahovic. As a player, he was a talented individual who was often undisciplined, but he has surprised everyone with how much he has changed since becoming the club's sports director last year.

Maribor brought in midfielder Dejan Jurkic from Czech side Kladno in pre-season but, as in many countries at the moment, there is little money in Slovenian football.

The richest club in the country are **Interblock**, whose president Joze Pececnik wants to create a club that can compete in Europe. That dream will have to wait at least another year, however, as – despite bringing in players such as English defender Ben Gill and Cameroon Under-20 midfielder Enowa Tabot – they went out of the Europa League to Metalurh Donetsk this term.

Changed man...Zahovic

Deducted two points and with a squad made up mostly of youngsters, Olimpija could face a tough season

Of the other teams that could challenge Maribor, last season's runners-up **Gorica** might fancy their chances, while **Rudar** continue to improve under coach Marijan Pusnik and could spring a surprise.

While 21-year-old Gill was joining Interblock from non-league Weymouth, Jure Travner was moving to England. However, his move to second-tier Watford won't help his old club **Celje** in a predicted battle against relegation.

One of the 10-team top flight is relegated automatically, while the team in ninth place faces a play-off with the Second League runners up.

Drava stayed up via the play-offs last season, having finished on the same points as **Koper**, and these two clubs could be joined in a relegation scrap by **Domzale** and **Nafta**.

Zdravko Reic

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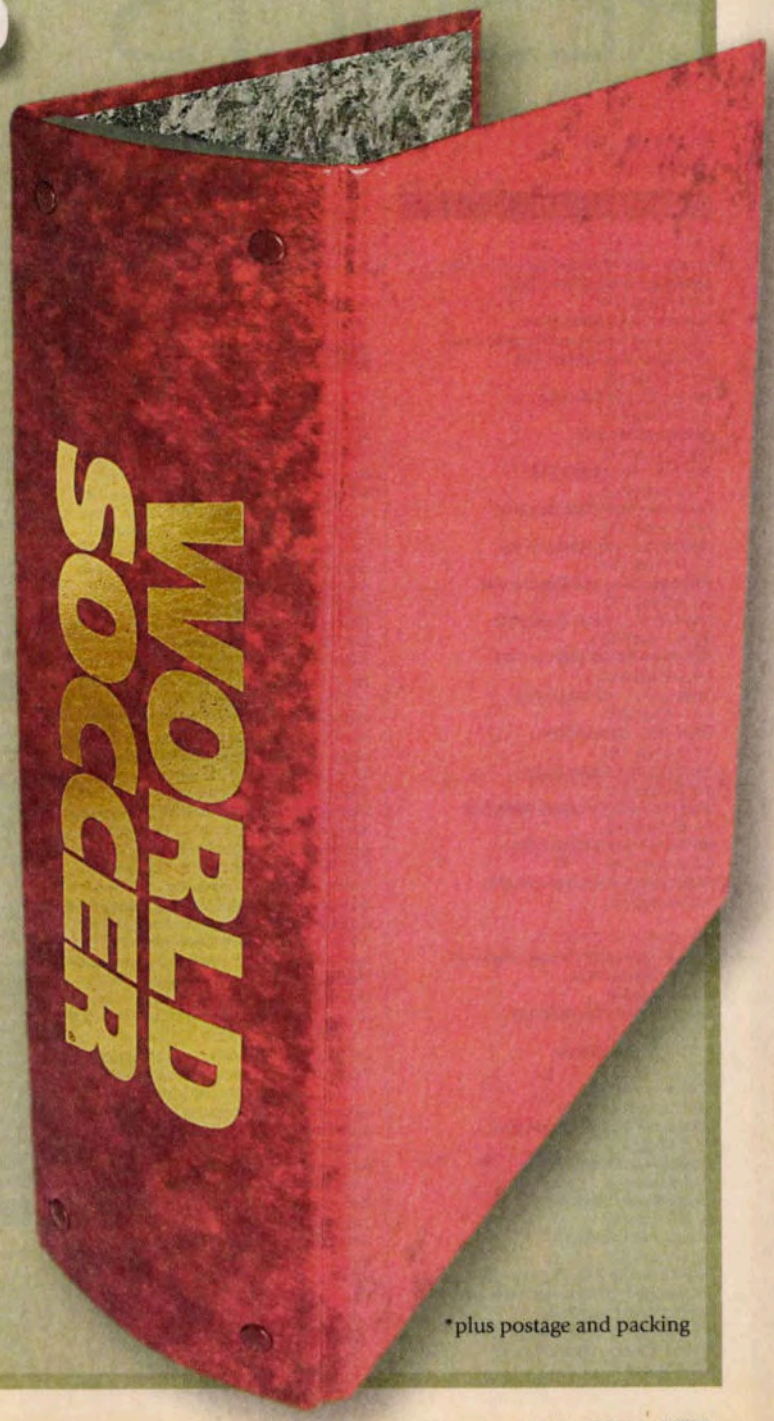

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Success...Standard celebrate beating Genk

BELGIUM

Standard procedure

Standard Liege beat Genk 2-0 to win the Belgian Super Cup, with goals from Wilfried Dalmat and Axel Witsel.

BULGARIA

Levski lift Super Cup

Cedric Bardon scored the only goal of the game as Levski Sofia beat Litex Lovech in the season's curtain-raiser, the Bulgarian Super Cup.

CROATIA

Hajduk split with coach Mise

Ivica Kalinic replaced Ante Mise as coach of Hajduk Split following their 1-0 home defeat by Zadar.

The 53-year-old joins from Sibenik, where he had been in charge since 2007. "It's a big honour but I have a lot of work to do," said Kalinic, who was on the Hajduk coaching staff when the team reached the 1995 Champions League quarter-finals.

"It's a challenge for me and I will do my best."

Hajduk have yet to win any of their opening four league games and are fourth from bottom – 10 points behind league leaders and arch-rivals Dinamo Zagreb.

RESULTS

EUROPE

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 14/15; 2nd legs - July 21/22

Copenhagen (Den) v Mogren (Mne)
6-0, 6-0 (agg 12-0)
Debrecen (Hun) v Kalmar (Swe)
2-0, 1-3 (agg 3-3; Debrecen on away goals)
EB/Streymur (Far) v APOEL (Cyp)
0-2, 0-3 (agg 0-5)
Ekranas (Lit) v FK Baku (Aze)
2-2, 2-4 (agg 4-6)
FH (Ice) v Aktobe (Kaz)
0-4, 0-2 (agg 0-6)
Inter Turku (Fin) v Sheriff (Mol)
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Levski Sofia (Bul) v Sant Julia (And)
4-0, 5-0 (agg 9-0)
Maccabi Haifa (Isr) v Glentoran (NI)
6-0, 4-0 (agg 10-0)
Makedonija (Mac) v BATE Borisov (Bls)
0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4)
Pyunik (Arm) v Dinamo Zagreb (Cro)
0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3)
Rhyl (Wal) v Partizan Belgrade (Ser)
0-4, 0-8 (agg 0-12)
Salzburg (Aut) v Bohemians (Ire)
1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)
Tirana (Alb) v Stabaek (Nor)
1-1, 0-4 (agg 1-5)
Ventspils (Lat) v Dudelange (Lux)
3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1)
Wisla Krakow (Pol) v Levadia Tallinn (Est)
1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2)
WIT Georgia (Geo) v Maribor (Sln)
0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3)
Zrinjski (Bos) v Slovan Bratislava (Slk)
1-0, 0-4 (agg 1-4)

3rd qualifying round

1st legs - July 28/29; 2nd legs - August 4/5

Aktobe v Maccabi Haifa
0-0, 3-4 (agg 3-4)
Anderlecht (Blg) v Sivasspor (Tur)
5-0, 1-3 (agg 6-3)
APOEL v Partizan Belgrade
2-0, 0-1 (agg 2-1)
FK Baku v Levski Sofia
0-0, 0-2 (agg 0-2)
Celtic (Sco) v Dynamo Moscow (Rus)
0-1, 2-0 (agg 2-1)
Copenhagen v Stabaek
3-1, 0-0 (agg 3-1)
Levadia Tallinn v Debrecen
0-1, 0-1 (agg 0-2)
Salzburg v Dinamo Zagreb
1-1, 2-1 (agg 3-2)
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr) v Timisoara (Rom)
2-2, 0-0 (agg 2-2; Timisoara on away goals)
Sheriff v Slavia Prague (Cze)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; Sheriff on away goals)
Slovan Bratislava v Olympiakos (Gre)
0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4)
Sparta Prague (Cze) v Panathinaikos (Gre)
3-1, 0-3 (agg 3-4)
Sporting Lisbon (Por) v Twente Enschede (Hol)
0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; Sporting on away goals)
Ventspils v BATE Borisov
1-0, 1-2 (agg 2-2; Ventspils on away goals)
Zurich (Swi) v Maribor
2-3, 3-0 (agg 5-3)

Losing teams enter Europa League at 4th qualifying round stage

EUROPA LEAGUE

2nd qualifying round

1st legs - July 14/16; 2nd legs - July 23

AaB (Den) v Slavija (Bos) 0-0, 1-3 (agg 1-3); Anorthosis (Cyp) v Petrovac (Mne) 2-1, 1-3 (aet) (agg 3-4); Basle (Swi) v Santa Coloma (And) 3-0, 4-1 (agg 7-1); Bnei Yehuda (Isr) v Dinaburg (Lat) 4-0, 1-0 (agg 5-0); Brondby (Den) v Flora Tallinn (Est) 0-1, 4-1 (agg 4-2); Cherno More (Bul) v Iskra-Stal (Mol) 1-0, 3-0 (agg 4-0); Crusaders (NI) v Rabotnicki (Mac) 1-1, 2-4 (agg 3-5); Differdange (Lux) v Rijeka (Cro) 1-0, 0-3 (agg 1-3); Dinamo Minsk (Bls) v Tromso (Nor) 0-0, 1-4 (agg 1-4); Elfsborg (Swe) v Szombathely (Hun) 3-0, 0-0 (agg 3-0); Falkirk (Sco) v Vaduz (Lie) 1-0, 0-2 (aet) (agg 1-2); Flamurtari (Alb) v Motherwell (Sco) 1-0, 1-8 (agg 2-8); Gorica (Sln) v Lahti (Fin) 1-0, 0-2 (agg 1-2); Honka (Fin) v Bangor (Wal) 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0); Juvenes/Dogana (SaM) v Polonia Warsaw (Pol) 0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5); KR (Ice) v Larisa (Gre) 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Legia Warsaw (Pol) v Olimpi Rustavi (Geo) 3-0, 1-0 (agg 4-0); Metalurgs Liepaja (Lat) v Dinamo Tbilisi (Geo) 2-1, 1-3 (agg 3-4); Metalurh Donetsk (Ukr) v MTZ-RIPO (Bls) 3-0, 2-1 (agg 5-1); Milano (Mac) v Slaven (Cro) 0-4, 2-8 (agg 2-12); NAC Breda (Hol) v Gandzasar (Arm) 6-0, 2-0 (agg 8-0); Naftan (Bls) v Gent (Blg) 2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2; Gent on away goals); Omonia (Cyp) v HB (Far) 4-0, 4-1 (agg 8-1); Rapid Wien (Aut) v Vllaznia (Alb) 5-0, 3-0 (agg 8-0); Rosenborg (Nor) v Karabakh (Aze) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1); Rudar Velenje (Sln) v Red Star Belgrade (Ser) 0-1, 0-4 (agg 0-5); Sarajevo (Bos) v Spartak Trnava (Slk) 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1); Sevojno (Ser) v FBK Kaunas (Lit) 0-0, 1-1 (agg 1-1; Sevojno on away goals); Sigma Olomouc (Cze) v Fram (Ice) 1-1, 2-0 (agg 3-1); Skonto (Lat) v Derry (Ire) 1-1, 0-1 (agg 1-2); Sliema (Mlt) v Maccabi Netanya (Isr) 0-0, 0-3 (agg 0-3); St Patrick's (Ire) v Valletta (Mlt) 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1); Steaua Bucharest (Rom) v Ujpest (Hun) 2-0, 2-1 (agg 4-1); Sturm Graz (Aut) v Siroki Brijeg (Bos) 2-1, 1-1 (agg 3-2); Suduva (Lit) v Randers (Den) 0-1, 1-1 (agg 1-2); Tobol (Kaz) v Galatasaray (Tur) 1-1, 0-2 (agg 1-3); Vetra (Lit) v HJK Helsinki (Fin) 0-1, 3-1 (agg 3-2); Zestafoni (Geo) v Helsingborgs (Swe) 1-2, 2-2 (aet) (agg 3-4); Zilina (Slk) v Dacia (Mol) 2-0, 1-0 (agg 3-0); Zimbru (Mol) v Pacos Ferreira (Por) 0-0, 0-1 (agg 0-1)

3rd qualifying round

1st legs - July 28/30; 2nd legs - August 4/6

Aberdeen (Sco) v Sigma Olomouc 1-5, 0-3 (agg 1-8); Athletic Bilbao (Spa) v Young Boys (Swi) 0-1, 2-1 (agg 2-2; Athletic Bilbao on away goals); Bnei Yehuda v Pacos Ferreira 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Brondby v Legia Warsaw 1-1, 2-2 (agg 3-3; Brondby on away goals); Club Brugge (Blg) v Lahti 3-2, 1-1 (agg 4-3); CSKA Sofia (Bul) v Derry 1-0, 1-1 (agg 2-1); Dinamo Tbilisi v Red Star Belgrade 2-0, 2-5 (agg 4-5); Fenerbahce (Tur) v Honved (Hun) 5-1, 1-1 (agg 6-2); Fredrikstad (Nor) v Lech Poznan (Pol) 1-6, 2-1 (agg 3-7); Helsingborgs v Sarajevo 2-1, 1-2 (aet) (agg 3-3; Sarajevo 5-4 on pens); Honka v Karabakh 0-1, 1-2 (agg 1-3); IFK Gothenburg (Swe) v Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr) 1-3, 1-1 (agg 2-4); KR v Basle 2-2, 1-3 (agg 3-5); Maccabi Netanya v Galatasaray 1-4, 0-6 (agg 1-10); Metalurh Donetsk v Interblock (Sln) 2-0, 3-0 (agg 5-0); Petrovac v Sturm Graz 1-2, 0-5 (agg 1-7); Polonia Warsaw v NAC Breda 0-1, 1-3 (agg 1-4); PSV Eindhoven (Hol) v Cherno More 1-0, 1-0 (agg 2-0); Rabotnicki v OB Odense (Den) 3-4, 0-3 (agg 3-7); Randers v Hamburg (Ger) 0-4, 1-0 (agg 1-4); Rapid Wien v APOP (Cyp) 2-1, 2-2 (aet) (agg 4-3); Rijeka v Metalist (Ukr) 1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4); Roma (Ita) v Gent 3-1, 7-1 (agg 10-2); Sevojno v Lille (Fra) 0-2, 0-2 (agg 0-4); Slavija v Kosice (Slk) 0-2, 1-3 (agg 1-5); Sporting Braga (Por) v Elfsborg 1-2, 0-2 (agg 1-4); St Patrick's v Krylia Sovetov (Rus) 1-0, 2-3 (agg 3-3; St Patrick's on away goals); Steaua Bucharest v Motherwell 3-0, 3-1 (agg 6-1); Tromso v Slaven 2-1, 2-0 (agg 4-1); Vaduz v Slovan Liberec (Cze) 0-1, 0-2 (agg 0-3); Valerenga (Nor) v PAOK Salonika (Gre) 1-2, 1-0 (agg 2-2; PAOK on away goals); Vaslui (Rom) v Omonia 2-0, 1-1 (agg 3-1); Vetra v Fulham (Eng) 0-3, 0-3 (agg 0-6); Vojvodina (Ser) v Austria Wien (Aut) 1-1, 2-4 (agg 3-5); Zilina v Hajduk Split (Cro) 1-1, 1-0 (agg 2-1)

AUSTRIA

July 24: LASK 4 Austria Wien 5.
July 25: Ried 1 Salzburg 0.
July 26: Mattersburg 2 Rapid 1; Sturm 3 Wiener Neustadt 0; Kapfenberger 3 Austria Karnten 2.
July 31: Wiener Neustadt 2 Ried 1.
Aug 1: Salzburg 3 LASK 2.
Aug 2: Rapid 5 Austria Karnten 1; Sturm 2 Mattersburg 0; Austria Wien 3 Kapfenberger 0.
Aug 7: LASK 4 Kapfenberger 0.
Aug 8: Mattersburg 2 Salzburg 3.
Aug 9: Austria Wien 2 Wiener Neustadt 1; Ried 1 Rapid 1; Austria Karnten 1 Sturm 3.

AUSTRIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sturm	3	3	0	0	8	1	9
Austria Wien	4	3	0	1	11	7	9
Salzburg	4	3	0	1	8	6	9
Ried	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
LASK	4	2	0	2	14	8	6
W Neustadt	4	2	0	2	6	7	6
Rapid	3	1	1	1	7	4	4
Mattersburg	4	1	0	3	4	10	3
Kapfenberger	4	1	0	3	3	10	3
A Karnten	4	0	0	4	5	14	0

BELGIUM

July 31: Standard 2 St Truiden 2.
Aug 1: Genk 1 Mouscron 2; Lokeren 1 Zulte Waregem 1; Kortrijk 0 Anderlecht 2; Mechelen 4 Westerlo 1; Roeselare 1 Germinal Beerschot 1.
Aug 2: Charleroi 1 Club Brugge 2; Cercle Brugge 1 Gent 3.
Aug 7: Germinal Beerschot 1 Standard 1.
Aug 8: Anderlecht 3 Cercle Brugge 2; St Truiden 0 Charleroi 0; Zulte Waregem 2 Genk 2; Mouscron 0 Roeselare 0; Westerlo 1 Kortrijk 1.
Aug 9: Gent 2 Mechelen 1; Club Brugge 2 Lokeren 0.
Aug 15: Anderlecht 3 Westerlo 0; Genk 1 Gent 1; Cercle Brugge 2 Zulte Waregem 2; Lokeren 1 St Truiden 2; Mechelen 2 Club Brugge 1; Roeselare 1 Standard 5.
Aug 16: Kortrijk 2 Mouscron 2; Charleroi 1 Germinal Beerschot 0.

BELGIUM	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anderlecht	3	3	0	0	8	2	9
Gent	3	2	1	0	6	3	7
Mechelen	3	2	0	1	7	4	6
Club Brugge	3	2	0	1	5	3	6
Standard	3	1	2	0	8	4	5
Mouscron	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
St Truiden	3	1	2	0	4	3	5
Charleroi	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Z Waregem	3	0	3	0	5	5	3
Genk	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Germinal B	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Kortrijk	3	0	2	1	3	5	2
Roeselare	3	0	2	1	2	6	2
Cercle Brugge	3	0	1	2	5	8	1
Lokeren	3	0	1	2	2	5	1
Westerlo	3	0	1	2	2	8	1

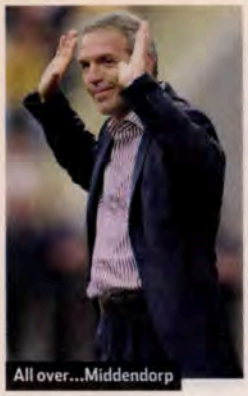
BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA

Aug 1: Zvijezda 2 Zrinjski 0; Leotar 1 Rudar 0; Laktasi 0 Borac 2; Velez 5 Travnik 0; Celik 0 Zeljeznicar 1; Olimpik 2 Modrica 2.
Aug 2: Sarajevo 1 Sloboda 1.
Aug 8: Travnik 3 Zrinjski 3; Rudar 1 Celik 1; Sloboda 2 Laktasi 4; Velez 4 Olimpik 1; Borac 2 Leotar 0.
Aug 9: Slavija 2 Zvijezda 0; Zeljeznicar 1 Siroki Brijeg 0; Modrica 3 Sarajevo 0.
Aug 15: Sarajevo 1 Velez 1; Laktasi 1 Modrica 1; Leotar 1 Sloboda 0; Celik 0 Borac 1; Siroki Brijeg 1 Rudar 0; Zvijezda 2 Zeljeznicar 1.
Aug 16: Olimpik 1 Travnik 0; Zrinjski 0 Slavija 0.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borac	3	3	0	0	5	0	9
Velez	3	2	1	0	10	2	7
Zvijezda	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Zeljeznicar	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Leotar	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Modrica	3	1	2	0	6	3	5
Slavija	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Laktasi	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Olimpik	3	1	1	1	4	6	4
Siroki Brijeg	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Zrinjski	3	0	2	1	3	5	2
Sarajevo	3	0	2	1	2	5	2
Celik	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Rudar	3	0	1	2	1	3	1
Sloboda	3	0	1	2	3	6	1
Travnik	3	0	1	2	3	9	1

BULGARIA

Aug 7: Beroe 2 Lokomotiv Sofia 1.
Aug 8: Lokomotiv Mezdra 0 Lovech 5; Montana 0 Sliven 0; Pirin 0 Minyor 1; Levski 5 Botev 0.
Aug 9: Lokomotiv Plovdiv 0 CSKA 5; Chernomorets 2 Cherno More 1.
Aug 10: Sportist 1 Slavia 1.
Aug 14: Lokomotiv Sofia 3 Sportist 2.
Aug 15: Minyor 0 Levski 2; Botev 2 Montana 3; Slavia 1 Lokomotiv Mezdra 0; CSKA 3 Beroe 0.
Aug 16: Cherno More 4 Sliven 0; Lovech 0 Pirin 1.
Aug 17: Chernomorets 2 Lokomotiv Plovdiv 1.


All over...Middendorp

CYPRUS

Middendorp dropped

Anorthosis Famagusta sacked coach Ernst Middendorp three months after his appointment following their elimination from the Europa League by Petrovac of Montenegro. They also dispensed with Bosnian goalkeeper Nemanja Supic. Serbian coach Slavo Muslin has taken charge.

Elsewhere, APOEL came from behind to beat APOP Kinyras/Peyias 2-1 in the Cypriot Super Cup.

Sebastian Gonzalez put APOP ahead, but APOEL hit back in the second half through Boban Grncarov and Nektarios Alexandrou.

FAROE ISLANDS

Vikingur victorious

Vikingur won the Faroese Cup, beating EB/Streymur 3-2 with goals from Hans Jorgen Djurhuus, Andreas Lava Olsen and Finnur Justinussen. Pauli Hansen and Arnbjorn Hansen replied for the holders.

FRANCE

Bordeaux triumph

Bordeaux beat Guingamp 2-0, with goals from Fernando Cavenaghi and Fernando Menegazzo, to win the French Super Cup.

Glory...Bordeaux lift the Super Cup

BULGARIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CSKA	2	2	0	0	8	0	6
Levski	2	2	0	0	7	0	6
Chernomorets	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Montana	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Slavia	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Lovech	2	1	0	1	5	1	3
Cherno More	2	1	0	1	5	2	3
Lok Sofia	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Pirin	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Minyor	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Beroe	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Sportist	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Sliven	2	0	1	1	0	4	1
Botev	2	0	0	2	2	8	0
Lok Plovdiv	2	0	0	2	1	7	0
Lok Mezdra	2	0	0	2	0	6	0

CROATIA

July 24: Inter 1 Varteks 1.
July 25: Dinamo 7 Istra 1; Medimurje 1 Karlovac 1; Sesvete 1 Sibenik 2; Zadar 0 Cibalia 3; Osijek 1 Hajduk 1.
July 26: Slaven 2 Zagreb 0; Rijeka 6 Lokomotiva 0.
July 31: Zagreb 0 Inter 3.
Aug 1: Istra 3 Lokomotiva 1; Sibenik 2 Osijek 2; Karlovac 0 Sesvete 0; Dinamo 4 Medimurje 0.
Aug 2: Varteks 1 Rijeka 1; Cibalia 2 Slaven 0; Hajduk 0 Zadar 1.
Aug 7: Inter 1 Cibalia 0.
Aug 8: Medimurje 4 Istra 2; Sesvete 2 Dinamo 5; Osijek 0 Karlovac 1; Zadar 2 Sibenik 1; Varteks 2 Lokomotiva 1.
Aug 9: Rijeka 3 Zagreb 1; Slaven 2 Hajduk 1.
Aug 14: Zagreb 2 Lokomotiva 4.
Aug 15: Istra 0 Varteks 1; Cibalia 1 Rijeka 0; Hajduk 2 Inter 2; Sibenik 0 Slaven 0; Karlovac 2 Zadar 0; Medimurje 2 Sesvete 1.
Aug 16: Dinamo 5 Osijek 0.

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dinamo	4	4	0	0	21	3	12
Cibalia	4	3	0	1	6	1	9
Inter	4	2	2	0	7	3	8
Karlovac	4	2	2	0	4	1	8
Varteks	4	2	2	0	5	3	8
Rijeka	4	2	1	1	10	3	7
Slaven	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Medimurje	4	2	1	1	7	8	7
Zadar	4	2	0	2	3	6	6
Sibenik	4	1	2	1	5	5	5
Istra	4	1	0	3	6	13	3
Lokomotiva	4	1	0	3	6	13	3
Hajduk	4	0	2	2	4	6	2
Osijek	4	0	2	2	3	9	2
Sesvete	4	0	1	3	4	9	1
Zagreb	4	0	0	4	3	12	0

CZECH REPUBLIC

July 24: Teplice 0 Sparta 0.
July 25: Ostrava 2 Pribram 1; Slavia 1 Mlada Boleslav 1; Slovacko 2 Plzen 3; Liberec 1 Kladno 1.
July 26: Bohemians 0 Olomouc 2; Ceske Budejovice 1 Jablonec 1.
July 27: Bohemians 1905 0 Brno 0.
July 31: Sparta 0 Bohemians 1905 0.
Aug 1: Plzen 2 Teplice 2.
Aug 2: Bohemians 0 Ceske Budejovice 2; Brno 2 Slavia 0; Olomouc 0 Ostrava 0; Mlada Boleslav 4 Liberec 1; Kladno 0 Pribram 2.
Aug 3: Jablonec 3 Slovacko 2.
Aug 8: Pribram 1 Sparta 1; Ostrava 1 Plzen 0.
Aug 9: Bohemians 1905 0 Jablonec 1; Teplice 3 Ceske Budejovice 0; Liberec 0 Brno 1; Slavia 3 Bohemians 1; Slovacko 2 Olomouc 0.
Aug 10: Kladno 1 Mlada Boleslav 3.
Aug 14: Brno 1 Slovacko 0.
Aug 15: Sparta 2 Kladno 0; Ceske Budejovice 0 Slavia 1.
Aug 16: Bohemians 1 Teplice 3; Mlada Boleslav 2 Pribram 0; Olomouc 1 Bohemians 1905 1; Plzen 2 Liberec 3.
Aug 17: Jablonec 2 Ostrava 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
M Boleslav	4	3	1	0	10	3	10
Brno	4	3	1	0	4	0	10
Jablonec	4	3	1	0	7	4	10
Teplice	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
Slavia	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Ostrava	4	2	1	1	4	3	7
Sparta	4	1	3	0	3	1	6
Olomouc	4	1	2	1	3	3	5
Plzen	4	1	1	2	7	8	4
Pribram	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
C Budejovice	4	1	1	2	3	5	4
Liberec	4	1	1	2	5	8	4
Slovacko	4	1	0	3	6	7	3
Boh'ians 1905	4	0	3	1	1	2	3
Kladno	4	0	1	3	2	8	1
Bohemians	4	0	0	4	2	10	0

DENMARK

July 20: AGF 1 AaB 0.
July 25: Copenhagen 7 HB Koge 1; OB 3 SonderjyskE 1.
July 26: Silkeborg 4 Midtjylland 0; Esbjerg 2 Brondby 1.
July 27: Randers 2 AGF 3.
Aug 1: Copenhagen 1 Silkeborg 1; SonderjyskE 1 Esbjerg 1.
Aug 2: HB Koge 0 AaB 5; Nordsjaelland 2 Randers 2; Brondby 3 Midtjylland 1.
Aug 3: AGF 2 OB 2.
Aug 8: Nordsjaelland 3 Silkeborg 0.
Aug 9: Midtjylland 4 Randers 1; AGF 2 HB Koge 1; Esbjerg 1 OB 2; Sonderjyske 0 Copenhagen 1; Brondby 0 AaB 2.
Aug 15: Copenhagen 0 AGF 1; AaB 1 SonderjyskE 0.
Aug 16: Silkeborg 2 Esbjerg 3; Randers 1 Brondby 3; HB Koge 1 Nordsjaelland 1.
Aug 17: OB 1 Midtjylland 0.

DENMARK

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AGF	5	4	1	0	9	5	13
OB	5	3	2	0	10	6	11
AaB	4	3	0	1	8	1	9
Nordsjaelland	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
Esbjerg	5	2	2	1	7	6	8
Copenhagen	5	2	1	2	9	5	7
Brondby	5	2	1	2	9	8	7
Silkeborg	5	1	2	2	8	8	5
SonderjyskE	5	1	1	3	3	6	4
Midtjylland	5	1	1	3	5	9	4
HB Koge	5	0	2	3	4	16	2
Randers	5	0	1	4	6	13	1

ENGLAND

Saturday, August 15

Aston Villa 0
Wigan 2 (Rodallega 31, Koumas 56) Att: 35,578

Blackburn 0
Manchester City 2 (Adebayor 2, Ireland 90) Att: 29,584

Bolton 0
Sunderland 1 (Bent 5) Att: 22,247

Chelsea 2 (Drogba 37, 90)
Hull 1 (Hunt 28) Att: 41,597

Everton 1 (Saha 90)
Arsenal 6 (Denilson 26, Vermaelen 37, Gallas 41, Fabregas 48, 70, Eduardo 89) Att: 39,309

Portsmouth 0
Fulham 1 (Zamora 13) Att: 17,510

Stoke 2 (Shawcross 19, Jordan og 33)
Burnley 0 Att: 27,385

Wolverhampton 0
West Ham 2 (Noble 22, Upson 69) Att: 28,674

Sunday, August 16

Manchester United 1 (Rooney 34)
Birmingham 0 Att: 75,062

Tottenham 2 (Assou-Ekotto 44, Bassong 59)
Liverpool 1 (Gerrard pen 56) Att: 35,935

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Arsenal	1	1	0	0	6	1	3
Man City	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Stoke	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
West Ham	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Wigan	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Chelsea	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Tottenham	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Fulham	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Man Utd	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Sunderland	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Hull	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Liverpool	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Birmingham	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Bolton	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Portsmouth	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Aston Villa	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Blackburn	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Burnley	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Wolves	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Everton	1	0	0	1	1	6	0

LEADING GOALSCORERS

2 Didier Drogba (Chelsea)
2 Cesc Fabregas (Arsenal)

COMMUNITY SHIELD

Aug 9 - Wembley
Chelsea 2 (Ricardo Carvalho 52, Lampard 71)
Manchester United 2 (Nani 10, Rooney 90)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 85,896. **Ref:** Foy
Chelsea 4-1 on pens

FINLAND

July 20: Jaro 0 Tampere 0.
July 25: Jaro 0 Inter 1.
July 26: Honka 3 VPS 0; HJK 3 Haka 3; RoPS 0 Lahti 1; Tampere 2 MyPa 0; KuPS 2 Mariehamn 2.
July 27: JJK 1 TPS 1.
July 31: TPS 1 Tampere 0.
Aug 1: Inter 4 RoPS 0.
Aug 2: Haka 2 JJK 4; Mariehamn 0 HJK 0; MyPa 1 Honka 3; KuPS 2 Jaro 2; VPS 1 Lahti 0.
Aug 5: JJK 1 KuPS 2.
Aug 6: Jaro 1 VPS 3.
Aug 7: Tampere 1 Haka 1.
Aug 9: Mariehamn 2 RoPS 1; Lahti 0 MyPa 1; Honka 1 HJK 1; TPS 2 Inter 0.
Aug 14: Inter 2 KuPS 3.
Aug 15: Honka 3 Tampere 1.
Aug 16: HJK 1 JJK 1; RoPS 0 Haka 0; MyPa 1 Mariehamn 2; VPS 0 TPS 2.
Aug 17: Jaro 0 Lahti 1.

FINLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TPS	19	10	7	2	31	14	37
HJK	19	9	8	2	32	17	35
Honka	19	8	9	2	38	21	33
Mariehamn	19	7	11	1	21	12	32
Haka	19	8	6	5	26	19	30
Inter	19	8	3	8	22	20	27
Tampere	19	8	2	9	18	21	26
VPS	19	8	2	9	20	24	26
Lahti	19	6	7	6	22	23	25
MyPa	18	6	4	8	19	22	22
Jaro	19	5	6	8	24	26	21
KuPS	19	4	4	11	18	38	16
JJK	18	3	6	9	18	28	15
RoPS	19	3	3	13	16	40	12

FRANCE

Saturday, August 8

Auxerre 0
Sochaux 1 (Sverkos 40) Att: 12,562

Grenoble 0
Marseille 2 (Niang 2, Cheyrou 81) Att: 19,662

Le Mans 2 (Maiga 21, Coutadeur pen 59)
Lyon 2 (Bodmer 28, Lopez 90) Att: 10,391

Monaco 1 (Nene 45)
Toulouse 0 Att: 11,260

Montpellier 1 (Spahic 90)
Paris Saint-Germain 1 (Giuly 71) Att: 29,312

Rennes 3 (Bangoura 7, Mangane 45, Leroy 90)
Boulogne 0 Att: 21,462

Saint-Etienne 0
Nice 2 (Traore 39, Remy 88) Att: 29,243

Valenciennes 1 (Samassa 6)
Nancy 3 (Feret 17, Brison 60, Traore pen 71) Att: 11,777

Sunday, August 9

Bordeaux 4 (Wendel 12, Gourcuff 53, 90+, Chamakh 90)
Lens 1 (Jemaa 40) Att: 32,735

Lille 1 (Monterubbio og 66)
Lorient 2 (Gameiro 33, Vahirua 52) Att: 14,000

Saturday, August 15

Lens 2 (Monnet-Paquet 14, Boukari 60)
Auxerre 0 Att: 34,671

Lorient 2 (Gameiro 68, Koscielny 90)
Montpellier 2 (Costa 60, Spahic 67) Att: 10,167

Lyon 1 (Gomis 37)
Valenciennes 0 Att: 31,745

Nancy 4 (Dia 30, Andre Luiz pen 42, Alo'o Efoulou 50, 80)
Monaco 0 Att: 17,099

Paris Saint-Germain 3 (Erdinc 33, Thomas og 60, Giuly 81)
Le Mans 1 (Helstad 21) Att: 30,558

Sochaux 2 (Davies 61, 90)
Bordeaux 3 (Chamakh 31, 80, Stevanovic og 43) Att: 16,689

Werder return...Pizarro

GERMANY

Pizarro back at Bremen

Peru striker Claudio Pizarro has rejoined Werder Bremen on a permanent basis, signing for the Bundesliga side from Chelsea for a fee reported to be around £4.5million.

The 30-year-old, who was with Bayern Munich before moving to the Premier League club, was on loan at Werder last season.

HOLLAND

Cup winners AZ make losing start

AZ Alkmaar won the Dutch Super Cup, beating Heerenveen 5-1 with goals from Brett Holman, Mounir El Hamdaoui, Maarten Martens and Jeremain Lens (two). Michal Papadopoulos scored a consolation for Heerenveen.

Less impressively, AZ also became the first reigning league champions to lose their opening league game since 2000, having Gill Swerts and Graziano Pelle sent off as they lost 3-2 to Heracles.

PORTUGAL

More Porto success

Porto won the pre-season Portuguese Super Cup, beating Pacos Ferreira 2-0 with goals from Ernesto Farias and Bruno Alves.

On target...Farias

Toulouse 3 (Machado 10, Gignac 67, Sissoko 81)
Saint-Etienne 1 (Riviere 25) Att: 21,202

Sunday, August 16
Boulogne 2 (Thil 34, 38)
Grenoble 1 (Ljuboja 46) Att: 10,452

Marseille 1 (Brandao 11)
Lille 0 Att: 26,965

Nice 1 (Ben Saada 44)
Rennes 1 (Gyan pen 45) Att: 12,824

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nancy	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
Bordeaux	2	2	0	0	7	3	6
Marseille	2	2	0	0	3	0	6
Rennes	2	1	1	0	4	1	4
PSG	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Nice	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Lorient	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Lyon	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Toulouse	2	1	0	1	3	2	3
Sochaux	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Lens	2	1	0	1	3	4	3
Boulogne	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Monaco	2	1	0	1	1	4	3
Montpellier	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Le Mans	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Lille	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
Grenoble	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Valenciennes	2	0	0	2	1	4	0
Auxerre	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Saint-Etienne	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

LEADING GOALSCORER
3 Marouane Chamakh (Bordeaux)

TROPHEE DES CHAMPIONS

July 25 - Montreal, Canada
Bordeaux 2 (Cavenaghi 38, Fernando 90)
Guingamp 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 34,068. **Ref:** DePiero (Can)

GERMANY

Friday, August 7
Wolfsburg 2 (Misimovic 71, Grafite 82)
Stuttgart 0 Att: 30,000

Saturday, August 8
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Matip og 75)
Koln 0 Att: 78,200

Hertha Berlin 1 (Kacar 82)
Hannover 0 Att: 42,169

1899 Hoffenheim 1 (Obasi 41)
Bayern Munich 1 (Olic 25) Att: 30,150

Mainz 2 (Hoogland 5, Gunkel 82)
Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Derdiyok 42, Kiessling 43) Att: 20,000

Nurnberg 1 (Mintal 88)
Schalke 2 (Kuranyi 36, 50) Att: 46,780

Werder Bremen 2 (Ozil pen 13, Sanogo 44)
Eintracht Frankfurt 3 (Amanatidis 6, 42, Fenin 71) Att: 33,000

Sunday, August 9
Bochum 3 (Azaouagh 51, 52, Sestak 63)
Monchengladbach 3 (Arango 19, Colautti 26, Brouwers 41) Att: 29,766

Freiburg 1 (Bechmann 65)
Hamburg 1 (Pitroipa 3) Att: 24,000

Saturday, August 15
Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Kiessling 67)
1899 Hoffenheim 0 Att: 28,000

Bayern Munich 1 (Gomez 72)
Werder Bremen 1 (Ozil 39) Att: 69,000

Eintracht Frankfurt 1 (Caio 17)
Nurnberg 1 (Bunjaku 64) Att: 49,000

Hamburg 4 (Demel 3, Ze Roberto 10, Guerrero 12, Berg 72)
Borussia Dortmund 1 (Haedo Valdez 5) Att: 57,000

Hannover 1 (Stajner pen 56)
Mainz 1 (Bance 53) Att: 28,952

Koln 1 (Ehret 49)
Wolfsburg 3 (Dzeko 73, Wome og 74, Martins 86) Att: 48,000

Stuttgart 4 (Pogrebnyak 53, Elson pen 65, 76, Schieber 88)
Freiburg 2 (Idrissou 70, 85) Att: 41,500

Sunday, August 16
Monchengladbach 2 (Brouwers 23, Matmour 52)
Hertha Berlin 1 (Kacar 53) Att: 41,814

Schalke 3 (Moritz 39, Westermann 45, Farfan 76)
Bochum 0 Att: 61,673

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Schalke	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Wolfsburg	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Hamburg	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
M'gladbach	2	1	1	0	5	4	4
E Frankfurt	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
B Leverkusen	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Stuttgart	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Hertha Berlin	2	1	0	1	2	2	3
B Dortmund	2	1	0	1	2	4	3
Mainz	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Bayern	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Werder	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Nurnberg	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Hannover	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Hoffenheim	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Freiburg	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Bochum	2	0	1	1	3	6	1
Koln	2	0	0	2	1	4	0

HOLLAND

July 31: Heerenveen 0 Roda JC 0.
Aug 1: Willem II 3 Vitesse 1; Heracles 3 AZ 2; Sparta 0 Twente 2; RKC 0 Utrecht 1.
Aug 2: Den Haag 1 NAC 2; Feyenoord 2 NEC 0; Groningen 0 Ajax 2; PSV 3 VVV 3.
Aug 7: NEC 4 Heerenveen 1; AZ 2 Sparta 0.
Aug 8: Ajax 4 RKC 1; Roda JC 1 Groningen 1.
Aug 9: NAC 0 Heracles 0; Vitesse 0 Feyenoord 0; Twente 1 PSV 1; Utrecht 1 Willem II 0; VVV 2 Den Haag 2.
Aug 15: Sparta 2 Willem II 1; Den Haag 0 Twente 1; RKC 0 AZ 6; Heerenveen 1 Vitesse 0.
Aug 16: PSV 4 Ajax 3; Roda JC 1 NEC 0; Heracles 0 Feyenoord 1; Utrecht 2 VVV 2; Groningen 1 NAC 2.

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Twente	3	2	1	0	4	1	7
Feyenoord	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
NAC	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
Utrecht	3	2	1	0	4	2	7
AZ	3	2	0	1	10	3	6
Ajax	3	2	0	1	9	5	6
PSV	3	1	2	0	8	7	5
Roda JC	3	1	2	0	2	1	5
Heracles	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Heerenveen	3	1	1	1	2	4	4
VVV	3	0	3	0	7	7	3
NEC	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Willem II	3	1	0	2	4	4	3
Sparta	3	1	0	2	2	5	3
Den Haag	3	0	1	2	3	5	1
Groningen	3	0	1	2	2	5	1
Vitesse	3	0	1	2	1	4	1
RKC	3	0	0	3	1	11	0

HUNGARY

July 24: Nyiregyhaza 5 Vasas 1.
July 25: Honved 3 Kaposvar 1; Papa 0 MTK 1; Zalaegerszeg 2 Paks 1; Kecskemet 3 Fehervar 6; Diosgyor 1 Debrecen 0.
July 26: Gyor 0 Ujpest 0.
July 31: Vasas 0 Gyor 2.
Aug 1: Debrecen 2 Papa 0; Ferencvaros 4 Zalaegerszeg 1; Paks 1 Nyiregyhaza 0; Fehervar 3 Diosgyor 2.
Aug 2: Ujpest 3 Kecskemet 1; Kaposvar 3 Szombathely 0; MTK 2 Honved 1.
Aug 7: Nyiregyhaza 3 Ferencvaros 1.
Aug 8: Vasas 3 Paks 1; Papa 0 Fehervar 1; Zalaegerszeg 0 Kaposvar 3; Kecskemet 2 Gyor 0.
Aug 9: Diosgyor 1 Ujpest 2; Szombathely 2 MTK 4.
Aug 14: Debrecen 2 Szombathely 1.
Aug 15: Fehervar 2 Honved 0; Gyor 3 Diosgyor 1; Ferencvaros 1 Paks 1; Kecskemet 5 Vasas 1; Kaposvar 1 Nyiregyhaza 1; MTK 1 Zalaegerszeg 0.
Aug 16: Ujpest 0 Papa 3.

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fehervar	4	4	0	0	12	5	12
MTK	4	4	0	0	8	3	12
Nyiregyhaza	4	2	1	1	9	4	7
Kaposvar	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Gyor	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Ujpest	4	2	1	1	5	5	7
Debrecen	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Kecskemet	4	2	0	2	11	10	6
Ferencvaros	3	1	1	1	6	5	4
Paks	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Honved	3	1	0	2	4	5	3
Papa	4	1	0	3	3	4	3
Diosgyor	4	1	0	3	5	8	3
Zalaegerszeg	4	1	0	3	3	9	3
Vasas	4	1	0	3	5	13	3
Szombathely	3	0	0	3	3	9	0

ICELAND

July 20: Throttur 4 Breidablik 0; IBV 1 Fram 1; Valur 0 Fylkir 1.
July 23: Breidablik 3 IBV 4; Fjolnir 2 Valur 0; Keflavik 1 Fylkir 0; Stjarnan 5 Throttur 1.
July 26: IBV 1 Stjarnan 0; FH 2 Breidablik 1.
July 27: Throttur 1 KR 5; Grindavik 1 Fjolnir 1; Valur 2 Keflavik 2; Fylkir 2 Fram 1.
Aug 5: Fjolnir 1 Throttur 3.
Aug 6: Stjarnan 1 FH 4; Breidablik 1 Fylkir 0; Fram 5 Keflavik 0; Grindavik 3 Valur 1.
Aug 9: Keflavik 0 Breidablik 3; Fylkir 2 Stjarnan 1; FH 2 KR 4; IBV 3 Fjolnir 1; Throttur 1 Grindavik 5; Valur 1 Fram 2.
Aug 15: Fjolnir 1 FH 4.
Aug 16: Breidablik 3 Fram 3.
Aug 17: Throttur 0 Valur 1; KR 2 Fylkir 4; Stjarnan 0 Keflavik 0.

ICELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FH	17	14	1	2	49	17	43
Fylkir	17	10	2	5	30	19	32
KR	16	9	3	4	36	24	30
Keflavik	17	6	7	4	25	29	25
Stjarnan	17	7	3	7	35	27	24
Valur	17	7	2	8	20	29	23
Fram	16	6	4	6	26	21	22
Breidablik	17	6	4	7	27	30	22
Grindavik	15	5	3	7	24	29	18
IBV	15	5	2	8	18	26	17
Fjolnir	17	3	3	11	20	36	12
Throttur	17	3	2	12	20	43	11

ITALY

SUPER CUP

Aug 8 - Beijing
Inter 1 (Eto'o 77)
Lazio 2 (Matuzalem 63, Rocchi 66)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Morganti

LATVIA

July 26: Dinaburg 2 Jurmala 0.
July 30: Tranzits 0 Dinaburg 2.
Aug 1: Daugava 0 Blazma 3.
Aug 2: Metalurgs 4 Jurmala 1.
Aug 3: Skonto 0 Dinaburg 1.
Aug 8: Ventspils 7 Tranzits 0.
Aug 15: Jurmala 0 Ventspils 4; Blazma 3 Olimps/RFS 1; Tranzits 1 Daugava 1.
Aug 16: Dinaburg 1 Metalurgs 2.

LATVIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ventspils	21	16	3	2	66	15	51
Metalurgs	21	16	3	2	59	15	51
Skonto	20	14	2	4	60	18	44
Dinaburg	20	10	4	6	25	19	34
Jurmala	20	7	4	9	23	40	25
Olimps/RFS	21	6	4	11	35	45	22
Blazma	21	4	3	14	16	53	15
Tranzits	22	1	8	13	13	44	11
Daugava	20	1	5	14	18	66	8

LITHUANIA

July 26: Vetra 4 LKKA 1; Suduva 1 Banga 1; Siauliai 2 Tauras 0; Ekranas 3 Kruoja 0.
Aug 2: Siauliai 0 Kruoja 0; Tauras 1 Suduva 0; Banga 0 Vetra 1; LKKA 0 Ekranas 3.
Aug 9: Kruoja 2 LKKA 1; Banga 0 Ekranas 3; Vetra 2 Tauras 1; Suduva 5 Siauliai 1.
Aug 16: Suduva 3 Kruoja 1; Siauliai 1 Vetra 0; Tauras 1 Ekranas 1; Banga 0 LKKA 1.

LITHUANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Suduva	18	11	6	1	40	10	39
Ekranas	17	11	5	1	34	12	38
Vetra	17	11	4	2	37	14	37
Siauliai	18	8	1	9	23	19	25
Tauras	18	5	5	8	15	19	20
Banga	18	4	5	9	14	29	17
LKKA	18	3	2	13	12	39	11
Kruoja	18	2	4	12	14	47	10

Hoop...Celtic's Aiden McGeady

ROMANIA

Cluj claim Cup

CFR Cluj won the first-ever Romanian Super Cup featuring no clubs from Bucharest, beating Unirea Urziceni 3-2 on penalties after drawing 1-1.

Nicolo Napoli stepped down as coach of FC Brasov after just three weeks for family reasons. He has been replaced by former national striker Viorel Moldovan.

RUSSIA

Kuban change coach

Struggling Kuban Krasnodar sacked their coach Sergei Ovchinnikov after a 2-0 home defeat by Saturn Moscow.

Meanwhile, Dynamo Moscow coach Andrei Kobelev has signed a two-year extension, tying him to the club until the end of 2011. The former Dynamo midfielder was appointed in 2006 following the resignation of Yuri Semin.

Gone...Ovchinnikov

22 away games without a win in Europe before Celtic's 2-0 victory at Dynamo Moscow

MACEDONIA

Aug 1: Pelister 0 Sloga 0; Sileks 1 Vardar 1; Milano 0 Renova 2; Teteks 2 Makedonija 2.
Aug 2: Rabotnicki 1 Metalurg 1.
Aug 3: Turnovo 3 Pobeda 1.
Aug 9: Renova 1 Makedonija 0; Vardar 3 Teteks 1; Pobeda 2 Sileks 2; Sloga 1 Turnovo 1; Metalurg 1 Pelister 2.
Aug 12: Milano 0 Rabotnicki 2.
Aug 18: Rabotnicki 2 Renova 1; Pelister 3 Milano 1; Turnovo 1 Metalurg 1; Sileks 2 Sloga 1; Teteks 3 Pobeda 1; Makedonija 5 Vardar 0.

MACEDONIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Pelister	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Rabotnicki	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Renova	3	2	0	1	4	2	6
Turnovo	3	1	2	0	5	3	5
Sileks	3	1	2	0	5	4	5
Makedonija	3	1	1	1	7	3	4
Teteks	3	1	1	1	6	6	4
Vardar	3	1	1	1	4	7	4
Metalurg	3	0	2	1	3	4	2
Sloga	3	0	2	1	2	3	2
Pobeda	3	0	1	2	4	8	1
Milano	3	0	0	3	1	7	0

MOLDOVA

July 25: Dinamo 2 Tiraspol 1; Nistru 1 Academia 2; CSCA-Rapid 0 Olimpia 0; Sheriff 2 Sfintul Gheorghe 0.
July 29: Viitorul 1 Dacia 5; Zimbru 3 Iskra-Stal 1.
Aug 2: Dacia 1 Nistru 1; Academia 2 Zimbru 2; Iskra-Stal 5 CSCA-Rapid 0; Sfintul Gheorghe 2 Dinamo 1; Tiraspol 0 Viitorul 0.
Aug 7: CSCA-Rapid 4 Academia 1; Sfintul Gheorghe 0 Olimpia 0; Nistru 1 Tiraspol 1; Dinamo 1 Viitorul 0; Zimbru 2 Dacia 1.
Aug 10: Sheriff 5 Iskra-Stal 0.
Aug 16: Olimpia 3 Dinamo 1; Dacia 4 CSCA-Rapid 0; Viitorul 0 Nistru 0.

MOLDOVA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	5	3	2	0	10	1	11
Dacia	6	3	2	1	15	7	11
CSCA-Rapid	7	3	1	3	9	17	10
Sheriff	3	3	0	0	13	0	9
Iskra-Stal	5	3	0	2	10	8	9
Zimbru	3	2	1	0	7	4	7
S Gheorghe	5	2	1	2	5	6	7
Dinamo	6	2	0	4	8	11	6
Academia	6	1	3	2	7	11	6
Viitorul	7	1	2	4	3	10	5
Tiraspol	5	0	3	2	3	5	3
Nistru	6	0	3	3	3	13	3

NORWAY

July 25: Start 2 Stabaek 2.
July 26: Viking 5 Lyn 2; Sandefjord 1 Molde 1; Valerenga 0 Odd Grenland 3; Tromso 2 Stromsgodset 1; Brann 4 Bodo/Glimt 2; Rosenborg 2 Lillestrom 1.
July 27: Aalesund 1 Fredrikstad 1.
Aug 1: Molde 8 Start 1.
Aug 2: Fredrikstad 1 Viking 0; Stabaek 3 Aalesund 0; Lillestrom 2 Tromso 2; Stromsgodset 3 Valerenga 0; Bodo/Glimt 1 Sandefjord 0; Odd Grenland 1 Rosenborg 1.
Aug 3: Lyn 2 Brann 2.
Aug 15: Rosenborg 2 Bodo/Glimt 0; Tromso 0 Stabaek 0.
Aug 16: Start 1 Fredrikstad 0; Brann 4 Stromsgodset 2; Aalesund 1 Odd Grenland 2; Sandefjord 2 Lyn 1; Valerenga 0 Lillestrom 1.
Aug 17: Viking 2 Molde 1.

NORWAY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rosenborg	20	14	6	0	39	14	48
Molde	21	12	5	4	46	25	41
Odd Grenland	21	9	9	3	39	26	36
Brann	21	9	6	6	40	36	33
Stabaek	21	8	8	5	34	21	32
Start	21	8	8	5	37	38	32
Viking	21	8	6	7	30	28	30
Tromso	20	6	8	6	27	28	26
Sandefjord	21	6	7	8	27	31	25
Valerenga	21	7	4	10	30	36	25
Lillestrom	21	5	8	8	28	35	23
Aalesund	21	6	5	10	22	34	23
Fredrikstad	21	6	4	11	23	29	22
Stromsgodset	21	5	5	11	23	31	20
Bodo/Glimt	21	5	5	11	21	40	20
Lyn	21	1	10	10	21	35	13

POLAND

July 31: Polonia Bytom 1 Belchatow 0; Lechia 2 Arka 1.
Aug 1: Wisla 2 Ruch 0; Jagiellonia 2 Odra 1; Slask 2 Cracovia 0.
Aug 2: Piast 1 Lech 3; Korona 4 Polonia Warsaw 0; Legia 4 Zaglebie 0.
Aug 7: Cracovia 2 Lechia 6; Zaglebie 1 Wisla 4.
Aug 8: Odra 0 Polonia Bytom 1; Belchatow 1 Jagiellonia 1; Ruch 2 Piast 0.
Aug 9: Polonia Warsaw 3 Slask 2; Korona 0 Lech 5; Arka 0 Legia 1.
Aug 14: Ruch 1 Arka 0; Slask 2 Polonia Bytom 1.
Aug 15: Piast 4 Zaglebie 1; Jagiellonia 2 Korona 0; Legia 0 Cracovia 0; Wisla 3 Belchatow 0.
Aug 16: Lechia 0 Odra 2; Lech 2 Polonia Warsaw 4.

POLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Wisla	3	3	0	0	9	1	9
Legia	3	2	1	0	5	0	7
Lech	3	2	0	1	10	5	6
Lechia	3	2	0	1	8	5	6
Slask	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Polonia B	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Ruch	3	2	0	1	3	2	6
Polonia W	3	2	0	1	7	8	6
Odra	3	1	0	2	3	3	3
Piast	3	1	0	2	5	6	3
Korona	3	1	0	2	4	7	3
Belchatow	3	0	1	2	1	5	1
Cracovia	3	0	1	2	2	8	1
Arka	3	0	0	3	1	4	0
Zaglebie	3	0	0	3	2	12	0
Jagiellonia*	3	2	1	0	5	2	-3

**10pts deducted for the club's involvement in a corruption scandal*

PORTUGAL

Aug 14: Leixoes 0 Belenenses 0.
Aug 15: Nacional 1 Sporting Lisbon 1; Sporting Braga 1 Academica 0.
Aug 16: Pacos Ferreira 1 Porto 1; Naval 0 Olhanense 0; Benfica 1 Maritimo 1; Uniao Leiria 1 Rio Ave 1.
Aug 17: Setubal 0 Guimaraes 0.

PORTUGAL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
S Braga	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
Benfica	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Maritimo	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Nacional	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
P Ferreira	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Porto	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Rio Ave	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Sporting L	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Uniao Leiria	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Belenenses	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Guimaraes	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Leixoes	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Naval	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Olhanense	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Setubal	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Academica	1	0	0	1	0	1	0

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

July 24: Bray 1 Galway 2; Dundalk 4 Drogheda 2.
July 26: Bohemians 0 Shamrock 0; Derry 1 Cork 1; Sligo 2 St Patrick's 0.
July 31: Cork 1 Bray 0; Drogheda 1 Bohemians 1; Galway 1 Sligo 0.
Aug 2: St Patrick's 1 Dundalk 0; Shamrock 2 Derry 1.
Aug 7: Bohemians 1 Cork 0; Drogheda 0 Shamrock 1.
Aug 8: Sligo 3 Dundalk 4.
Aug 11: St Patrick's 0 Bohemians 2; Galway 0 Drogheda 2; Dundalk 0 Bray 0; Sligo 0 Derry 4; Cork 0 Shamrock 0.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bohemians	24	16	4	4	37	12	52
Shamrock	24	13	8	3	32	17	47
Cork	24	12	5	7	26	15	41
Derry	23	11	5	7	31	17	38
Dundalk	24	10	3	11	29	30	33
Galway	23	8	4	11	20	29	28
St Patrick's	23	8	2	13	19	33	26
Drogheda	24	5	8	11	19	29	23
Sligo	24	5	6	13	22	38	21
Bray	23	4	7	12	18	33	19

ROMANIA

July 31: International 0 Otelul 1; Rapid 4 Politehnica 1.
Aug 1: CFR 2 Urziceni 0; Alba Iulia 0 Brasov 1; Timisoara 1 Gloria 0; Universitatea 0 Dinamo 0.
Aug 2: Astra 0 Pandurii 1; Ceahlaul 0 Steaua 2.
Aug 7: Gaz Metan 2 Universitatea 1; Dinamo 0 International 1.
Aug 8: Brasov 0 Astra 0; Pandurii 1 Vaslui 0; Urziceni 1 Rapid 0; Gloria 1 Alba Iulia 1.
Aug 9: Otelul 0 Ceahlaul 0; Politehnica 1 Timisoara 1; Steaua 2 CFR 2.
Aug 12: Vaslui 2 Gaz Metan 1.
Aug 14: Alba Iulia 2 Politehnica 1; Timisoara 1 Rapid 0.
Aug 15: Astra 0 Gloria 0; Ceahlaul 0 Dinamo 4; CFR 1 Otelul 0.
Aug 16: International 2 Gaz Metan 4; Universitatea 2 Pandurii 0; Vaslui 2 Brasov 2; Steaua 0 Urziceni 1.

ROMANIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
CFR	3	2	1	0	5	2	7
Timisoara	3	2	1	0	3	1	7
Gaz Metan	3	2	0	1	7	5	6
Pandurii	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Urziceni	3	2	0	1	2	2	6
Brasov	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Dinamo	3	1	1	1	4	1	4
Steaua	3	1	1	1	4	3	4
Universitatea	3	1	1	1	3	2	4
Vaslui	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Alba Iulia	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Otelul	3	1	1	1	1	1	4
Rapid	3	1	0	2	4	3	3
International	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Gloria	3	0	2	1	1	2	2
Astra	3	0	2	1	0	1	2
Politehnica	3	0	1	2	3	7	1
Ceahlaul	3	0	1	2	0	6	1

RUSSIA

July 22: CSKA 0 Spartak Nalchik 0.
July 24: Khimki 2 Amkar 0.
July 25: Krylia Sovetov 0 Saturn 2; Lokomotiv 1 Dynamo 1; Zenit 0 Rubin 0; Rostov 0 Tom 0.
July 26: CSKA 1 Spartak Moscow 2; Spartak Nalchik 0 FC Moscow 0; Kuban 1 Terek 1.
July 31: Rubin 2 Spartak Nalchik 0.
Aug 1: Tom 2 CSKA 3; Spartak Moscow 4 Kuban 0; Terek 1 FC Moscow 2.
Aug 2: Amkar 2 Krylia Sovetov 0; Khimki 0 Dynamo 2; Saturn 2 Zenit 2; Lokomotiv 2 Rostov 0.
Aug 8: FC Moscow 1 Rubin 3; Spartak Nalchik 2 Spartak Moscow 4; Kuban 0 Saturn 2.
Aug 9: Dynamo 0 Terek 1; Krylia 1 Lokomotiv 3; Zenit 0 Tom 2; CSKA 1 Amkar 0; Rostov 2 Khimki 0.
Aug 16: Amkar 2 Zenit 4; Tom 1 Kuban 0; Khimki 1 Krylia Sovetov 3; Lokomotiv 2 CSKA 1; Saturn 1 Spartak Nalchik 0; Rubin 4 Terek 0; Rostov 0 Dynamo 1; Spartak Moscow 2 FC Moscow 1.

RUSSIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rubin	18	11	4	3	36	13	37
Spartak M	18	11	3	4	34	16	36
CSKA	18	9	3	6	27	18	30
Dynamo	18	9	3	6	20	18	30
FC Moscow	18	8	6	4	21	13	30
Lokomotiv	18	7	7	4	22	18	28
Zenit	18	7	6	5	28	21	27
Saturn	18	7	5	6	20	21	26
Krylia Sovetov	18	7	3	8	19	22	24
Terek	18	6	6	6	20	26	24
Tom	18	6	5	7	18	20	23
Rostov	18	5	7	6	12	16	22
Amkar	18	4	6	8	17	27	18
Kuban	18	3	6	9	11	26	15
Spartak N	18	1	8	9	13	22	11
Khimki	18	2	4	12	14	35	10

SCOTLAND

Aug 15: Aberdeen 1 Celtic 3; Hibernian 2 St Mirren 1; Kilmarnock 3 Hamilton 0; Rangers 4 Falkirk 1; St Johnstone 2 Motherwell 2.
Aug 17: Dundee United 2 Hearts 0.

SLOVAKIA

Matic moves to the Premier League

Kosice sold 21-year-old midfielder Nemanja Matic to Chelsea for £1.5million, with club president Blazej Podolak explaining: "The success was down to the fact that the money does not come in instalments but immediately."

The Serb has two full caps for his country and played in the European Under-21 Championship this summer.

TURKEY

Fener off to a flyer

Two goals from Brazilian striker Alex gave Fenerbahce a 2-0 victory over Besiktas in the Super Cup.

Fener also made a good start to their league campaign, winning both opening games without conceding a goal.

New Matic...Chelsea's signing

BOLIVIA

On-loan defender costs Bolivar title

Bolivar have been stripped of their opening championship title after they fielded an ineligible player.

The club were docked three points after a ruling that on-loan defender Augusto Mainguyague had not been eligible to play in their final league game away to Real Mamore.

Runners-up Real Potosi have now been awarded the title, but Bolivar president Guido Loayza says he will appeal the decision.

CHILE

Sampaoli quits

O'Higgins coach Jorge Sampaoli resigned after his side's 2-0 home defeat by Universidad de Concepcion.

SCOTLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	1	1	0	0	4	1	3
Kilmarnock	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Celtic	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Dundee Utd	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Hibernian	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Motherwell	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
St Johnstone	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
St Mirren	1	0	0	1	1	2	0
Aberdeen	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Hearts	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Falkirk	1	0	0	1	1	4	0
Hamilton	1	0	0	1	0	3	0

SERBIA

Aug 15: Cukaricki 0 Javor 1; Partizan 5 Borac 0; BSK 2 Mladi Radnik 3; Jagodina 0 Red Star 3; Napredak 2 Metalac 0; Spartak 0 OFK 1.
Aug 16: Hajduk 0 Vojvodina 3; Rad 3 Smederevo 1.

SERBIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizan	1	1	0	0	5	0	3
Red Star	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Vojvodina	1	1	0	0	3	0	3
Rad	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Napredak	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Mladi Radnik	1	1	0	0	3	2	3
Javor	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
OFK	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
BSK	1	0	0	1	2	3	0
Cukaricki	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Spartak	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Smederevo	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Metalac	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Hajduk	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Jagodina	1	0	0	1	0	3	0
Borac	1	0	0	1	0	5	0

SLOVAKIA

July 25: Petrzalka 1 DAC 0; Ruzomberok 1 Dukla 1; Kosice 0 Nitra 1; Tatran 0 Dubnica 0.
July 26: Zilina 3 Senica 0; Spartak 0 Slovan 2.
Aug 1: Senica 2 Dubnica 1; Dukla 3 Petrzalka 0; Nitra 2 Ruzomberok 0; DAC 3 Tatran 0.
Aug 2: Slovan 3 Kosice 0; Zilina 2 Spartak 1.
Aug 8: Petrzalka 0 Nitra 0; Dubnica 1 DAC 3; Tatran 0 Dukla 1; Spartak 3 Senica 0.
Aug 9: Ruzomberok 1 Slovan 3; Kosice 0 Zilina 2.
Aug 15: Senica 0 DAC 1; Dukla 3 Dubnica 0; Nitra 1 Tatran 0; Slovan 1 Petrzalka 1; Zilina 1 Ruzomberok 0.
Aug 18: Spartak 5 Kosice 4.

SLOVAKIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nitra	6	4	2	0	6	1	14
Slovan	5	4	1	0	12	2	13
Zilina	5	4	1	0	9	2	13
Dukla	6	3	3	0	8	1	12
DAC	6	3	1	2	8	5	10
Spartak	6	2	1	3	9	9	7
Petrzalka	6	1	3	2	2	5	6
Senica	6	2	0	4	5	13	6
Kosice	6	1	1	4	6	11	4
Tatran	6	1	1	4	3	8	4
Ruzomberok	6	0	3	3	4	9	3
Dubnica	6	0	3	3	3	9	3

SLOVENIA

July 25: Nafta 2 Celje 2; Interblock 0 Domzale 0.
July 28: Drava 1 Koper 3; Rudar 1 Maribor 0; Gorica 1 Olimpija 2.
July 31: Olimpija 0 Rudar 1; Domzale 1 Gorica 4.
Aug 1: Koper 2 Interblock 1; Maribor 3 Nafta 1; Celje 1 Drava 0.
Aug 8: Nafta 3 Drava 1; Gorica 1 Koper 2; Maribor 1 Olimpija 0.
Aug 9: Interblock 1 Celje 2; Rudar 4 Domzale 1.
Aug 14: Domzale 1 Maribor 3.
Aug 15: Koper 2 Rudar 2; Celje 2 Gorica 0.
Aug 16: Olimpija 2 Nafta 0; Drava 1 Interblock 1.

SLOVENIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rudar	5	4	1	0	10	3	13
Koper	5	4	1	0	10	5	13
Celje	5	3	1	1	7	4	10
Maribor	5	3	0	2	7	4	9
Gorica	5	2	0	3	7	7	6
Interblock	5	1	2	2	6	6	5
Olimpija*	5	2	0	3	5	6	4
Nafta	5	1	1	3	6	10	4
Drava	5	0	2	3	5	10	2
Domzale	5	0	2	3	5	13	2

**2pts deducted for missing a game during last season's second level campaign*

SPAIN

SUPER CUP 1st leg

Aug 16
Athletic Bilbao 1 (De Marcos 45)
Barcelona 2 (Xavi 58, Pedro 68)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 35,000. **Ref:** Rubinos Perez

SWEDEN

July 20: Orebro 1 Hacken 3; Malmo 0 Halmstads 0; Hammarby 0 Orgryte 1; GAIS 2 AIK 2.
July 25: Brommapojkarna 1 Kalmar 2.
July 26: Trelleborgs 2 IFK 1; Elfsborg 3 Djurgardens 1; Helsingborgs 2 Gefle 0.
July 27: AIK 1 GAIS 0; Orgryte 0 Hammarby 0; Halmstads 0 Malmo 3; Hacken 2 Orebro 2.
July 30: Malmo 0 AIK 0.
Aug 2: IFK 2 Hacken 2; Brommapojkarna 2 Halmstads 1; Kalmar 3 Elfsborg 1.
Aug 3: GAIS 0 Trelleborgs 1; Gefle 2 Djurgardens 0; Orebro 2 Orgryte 2; Hammarby 1 Helsingborgs 2.
Aug 6: Hacken 1 GAIS 0.
Aug 8: AIK 2 Brom'karna 1; Trelleborgs 0 Malmo 2.
Aug 9: Orgryte 1 IFK 2; Djurgardens 0 Hammarby 1; Halmstads 2 Kalmar 0; Elfsborg 2 Gefle 3; Helsingborgs 0 Orebro 1.
Aug 15: Kalmar 1 Gefle 1; Hammarby 2 Elfsborg 3.
Aug 16: IFK 2 Helsingborgs 2; Brommapojkarna 2 Trelleborgs 2.
Aug 17: Malmo 1 Hacken 2; Halmstads 1 AIK 2; Orebro 2 Djurgardens 0; GAIS 1 Orgryte 0.

SWEDEN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AIK	19	11	4	4	19	13	37
IFK	19	11	3	5	34	17	36
Elfsborg	19	10	6	3	32	19	36
Helsingborgs	19	11	2	6	31	22	35
Kalmar	19	10	4	5	34	20	34
Orebro	19	8	6	5	22	17	30
Hacken	19	8	5	6	26	22	29
Gefle	19	7	7	5	22	21	28
Trelleborgs	19	7	5	7	22	21	26
Malmo	19	6	7	6	18	14	25
Halmstads	19	5	7	7	18	22	22
Bromm'karna	19	5	6	8	22	29	21
Hammarby	19	5	4	10	16	24	19
GAIS	19	3	7	9	21	27	16
Djurgardens	19	4	2	13	11	38	14
Orgryte	19	1	5	13	11	33	8

SWITZERLAND

July 22: Zurich 1 St Gallen 0; Sion 3 Lucerne 1.
July 25: St Gallen 1 Xamax 1; Zurich 4 Bellinzona 1.
July 26: Aarau 0 Young Boys 3; Lucerne 2 Grasshopper 1; Sion 1 Basle 2.
Aug 1: Bellinzona 4 Aarau 1; Xamax 1 Sion 3.
Aug 2: Basle 1 Lucerne 1; Young Boys 2 Grasshopper 0.
Aug 8: Grasshopper 1 St Gallen 3; Sion 1 Aarau 1.
Aug 9: Basle 1 Zurich 1; Lucerne 2 Xamax 1; Young Boys 4 Bellinzona 2.
Aug 15: Sion 3 Zurich 3; St Gallen 1 Bellinzona 1.
Aug 16: Aarau 0 Xamax 4; Grasshopper 3 Basle 1; Lucerne 1 Young Boys 2.

SWITZERLAND	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Young Boys	6	5	1	0	15	6	16
Lucerne	6	3	1	2	9	9	10
St Gallen	6	2	3	1	8	5	9
Xamax	6	2	2	2	11	7	8
Sion	6	2	2	2	12	11	8
Zurich	6	2	2	2	11	11	8
Basle	6	2	2	2	7	9	8
Grasshopper	6	2	0	4	8	10	6
Bellinzona	6	1	2	3	10	13	5
Aarau	6	1	1	4	4	14	4

TURKEY

Aug 7: Istanbul BB 1 Besiktas 1.
Aug 8: Antalyaspor 0 Ankarospor 1; Diyarbakirspor 2 Ankaragucu 2; Sivasspor 1 Trabzonspor 2.
Aug 9: Gaziantepspor 2 Galatasaray 3; Genclerbirligi 0 Kayserispor 0; Bursaspor 2 Kasimpasa 1; Manisaspor 0 Eskisehirspor 0; Denizlispor 0 Fenerbahce 2.
Aug 15: Trabzonspor 1 Diyarbakirspor 2; Ankaragucu 1 Manisaspor 1; Galatasaray 4 Denizlispor 1.
Aug 16: Ankaraspor 1 Genclerbirligi 1; Eskisehirspor 3 Bursaspor 2; Kayserispor 1 Gaziantepspor 1; Kasimpasa 1 Istanbul BB 3; Fenerbahce 3 Sivasspor 0.
Aug 17: Besiktas 2 Antalyaspor 0.

TURKEY	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	2	2	0	0	5	0	6
Galatasaray	2	2	0	0	7	3	6
Istanbul BB	2	1	1	0	4	2	4
Besiktas	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Diyarbakirspor	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Eskisehirspor	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Ankaraspor	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Bursaspor	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Trabzonspor	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Ankaragucu	2	0	2	0	3	3	2
Genclerbirligi	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Kayserispor	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Manisaspor	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Gaziantepspor	2	0	1	1	3	4	1
Kasimpasa	2	0	0	2	2	5	0
Antalyaspor	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Sivasspor	2	0	0	2	1	5	0
Denizlispor	2	0	0	2	1	6	0

UKRAINE

July 24: Chornomorets 1 Arsenal 3.
July 25: Dynamo 6 Tavriya 0; Illichivets 0 Shakhtar 2; Dnipro 2 Metalist 0.
July 26: Zakarpattya 1 Vorskla 3; Metalurh Zaporizhya 2 Kryvbas 1; Obolon 3 Zorya 0; Karpaty 2 Metalurh Donetsk 2.
July 31: Tavriya 2 Chornomorets 1.
Aug 1: Zorya 0 Dnipro 1; Arsenal 4 Obolon 1; Kryvbas 1 Dynamo 3; Vorskla 1 Shakhtar 1.
Aug 2: Illichivets 2 Metalurh Zaporizhya 1; Metalist 1 Karpaty 0; Metalurh Donetsk 4 Zakarpattya 1.
Aug 7: Dnipro 1 Arsenal 1.
Aug 8: Dynamo 3 Illichivets 1; Tavriya 3 Kryvbas 1; Karpaty 4 Zorya 0; Chornomorets 0 Obolon 1.
Aug 9: Zakarpattya 0 Metalist 2; Shakhtar 4 Metalurh Donetsk 1; Metalurh Zaporizhya 1 Vorskla 1.

UKRAINE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Dynamo	4	4	0	0	17	2	12
Shakhtar	4	3	1	0	10	2	10
Metalist	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Tavriya	4	3	0	1	7	8	9
Arsenal	4	2	2	0	8	3	8
Dnipro	4	2	2	0	4	1	8
Karpaty	4	2	1	1	8	4	7
Obolon	4	2	0	2	5	6	6
Illichivets	4	2	0	2	4	6	6
Vorskla	4	1	2	1	6	5	5
Metalurh D	4	1	2	1	7	7	5
Metalurh Z	4	1	1	2	4	6	4
Zorya	4	0	1	3	0	8	1
Kryvbas	4	0	0	4	3	11	0
Zakarpattya	4	0	0	4	2	10	0
Chornomorets	4	0	0	4	2	11	0

SOUTH AMERICA

BOLIVIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

July 25: Aurora 0 Oriente 0.
July 26: Bolivar 1 Jorge Wilstermann 1; Nacional 2 San Jose 1; Blooming 4 Universitario 0; La Paz 2 Real Potosi 3; Real Mamore 2 The Strongest 2.
July 29: Jorge Wilstermann 0 Blooming 1; San Jose 2 Bolivar 2.
July 30: Universitario 1 Nacional 0; Real Potosi 2 Real Mamore 0; The Strongest 1 Aurora 0; Oriente 0 La Paz 0.
Aug 1: La Paz 1 San Jose 5.
Aug 2: The Strongest 1 Bolivar 2; Nacional 0 Real Potosi 2; Universitario 1 Real Mamore 0; Jorge Wilstermann 2 Aurora 1; Blooming 1 Oriente 1.
Aug 5: Oriente 1 Real Mamore 0.
Aug 6: Bolivar 2 Universitario 1.
Aug 8: Aurora 3 Real Mamore 0; Nacional 2 Blooming 0.
Aug 9: La Paz 2 The Strongest 2; Oriente 1 Real Potosi 0; San Jose 2 Jorge Wilstermann 2.
Aug 12: The Strongest 2 Oriente 0; Real Potosi 2 Aurora 0.
Aug 13: Jorge Wilstermann 2 Nacional 0; Universitario 1 San Jose 3.
Aug 15: Real Potosi 1 The Strongest 3.
Aug 16: Aurora 1 La Paz 1; Blooming 1 San Jose 1; Nacional 0 Bolivar 3; Real Mamore 1 Oriente 4; Universitario 2 Jorge Wilstermann 1.

BOLIVIA – CLOSING – GROUP A	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bolivar	6	4	2	0	13	7	14
San Jose	7	3	3	1	18	9	12
Universitario	7	3	1	3	7	11	10
J Wilstermann	7	2	3	2	9	8	9
Blooming	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Nacional	7	2	0	5	6	12	6

Loan problem...Mainguyague

COLOMBIA

De Avila returns

America's all-time top scorer Antony De Avila made his comeback for the club at the age of 46 – 10 years after retiring – as a substitute in the 1-1 draw at home to Pasto.

ECUADOR

Guerrero to England

Fernando Guerrero of second-tier side Independiente del Valle has joined Premier League clube Burnley on a season-long loan. The winger has been capped at full international level.

"Fernando is an exciting player for just 19 years of age and we believe he has unbelievable potential," says Burnley manger Owen Coyle. "We have agreed a loan deal, with an option to buy him.

"Obviously he is valued very highly by his club in Ecuador and if he comes in and shows us the quality we know he possesses, I think he can go on to become a truly outstanding player."

PARAGUAY

Champions struggle

Apertura winners Cerro Porteno lost 2-0 to Nacional on the opening weekend of the closing championship.

High hopes...Guerrero

BOLIVIA – CLOSING – GROUP B	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Potosi	7	4	1	2	11	7	13
The Strongest	7	3	3	1	12	8	12
Oriente	7	3	3	1	7	4	12
La Paz	6	1	3	2	7	11	6
Aurora	7	1	2	4	5	7	5
Real Mamore	6	0	1	5	3	13	1

BRAZIL

July 22: Avai 1 Gremio 0; Santo Andre 0 Cruzeiro 2; Flamengo 1 Barueri 1; Santos 1 Atletico Paranaense 0; Internacional 2 Sao Paulo 2; Goias 2 Palmeiras 1; Nautico 2 Botafogo 2.
July 23: Coritiba 1 Sport Recife 1; Corinthians 2 Vitoria 1; Atletico Mineiro 2 Fluminense 1.
July 25: Gremio 3 Santo Andre 2; Atletico Paranaense 1 Avai 3; Botafogo 3 Internacional 2.
July 26: Corinthians 0 Palmeiras 3; Santos 1 Flamengo 2; Atletico Mineiro 0 Goias 1; Sport Recife 3 Nautico 3; Barueri 1 Sao Paulo 2; Fluminense 1 Cruzeiro 1; Vitoria 1 Coritiba 0.
July 29: Coritiba 2 Botafogo 2; Nautico 1 Santos 2; Internacional 3 Barueri 2; Goias 3 Atletico Paranaense 0; Cruzeiro 1 Sport Recife 0; Palmeiras 1 Fluminense 0; Santo Andre 1 Corinthians 1.
July 30: Avai 4 Vitoria 0; Sao Paulo 2 Gremio 1; Flamengo 3 Atletico Mineiro 1.
Aug 1: Sport Recife 0 Palmeiras 1; Botafogo 2 Barueri 1.
Aug 2: Corinthians 0 Avai 0; Atletico Paranaense 1 Fluminense 0; Vitoria 0 Sao Paulo 1; Flamengo 1 Nautico 1; Santo Andre 1 Goias 2; Gremio 4 Cruzeiro 1; Atletico Mineiro 3 Coritiba 2.
Aug 5: Cruzeiro 0 Atletico Paranaense 2; Sao Paulo 3 Botafogo 1; Avai 1 Santo Andre 0; Goias 3 Flamengo 2; Nautico 1 Corinthians 0; Coritiba 0 Santos 1.
Aug 6: Fluminense 5 Sport Recife 1; Barueri 4 Vitoria 0; Palmeiras 1 Gremio 1.
Aug 8: Santos 2 Avai 2; Nautico 2 Santo Andre 1; Botafogo 0 Atletico Paranaense 1.
Aug 9: Flamengo 1 Corinthians 0; Vitoria 2 Fluminense 2; Coritiba 1 Cruzeiro 3; Sao Paulo 3 Goias 1; Barueri 1 Gremio 0.
Aug 10: Internacional 3 Sport Recife 0.
Aug 12: Atletico Mineiro 1 Palmeiras 1.
Aug 15: Avai 2 Nautico 1; Santo Andre 0 Internacional 2; Palmeiras 1 Botafogo 1.
Aug 16: Corinthians 2 Atletico Mineiro 0; Sport Recife 1 Sao Paulo 2; Gremio 4 Flamengo 1; Fluminense 1 Coritiba 3; Goias 3 Vitoria 2; Cruzeiro 0 Santos 0; Atletico Paranaense 3 Barueri 0.

BRAZIL	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Palmeiras	19	10	7	2	31	17	37
Goias	19	10	5	4	37	26	35
Internacional	17	10	3	4	31	20	33
Sao Paulo	19	9	6	4	28	21	33
At Mineiro	18	9	5	4	32	22	32
Avai	19	8	6	5	28	22	30
Gremio	19	8	4	7	33	22	28
Corinthians	19	8	4	7	23	23	28
Barueri	19	7	7	5	38	28	28
Flamengo	19	7	6	6	28	31	27
Vitoria	19	7	4	8	27	29	25
Santos	18	6	7	5	31	31	25
At Paranaense	19	7	3	9	21	29	24
Cruzeiro	18	6	3	9	18	27	21
Botafogo	18	4	8	6	25	30	20
Coritiba	19	5	4	10	26	32	19
Santo Andre	19	4	6	9	21	29	18
Nautico	19	4	6	9	22	37	18
Fluminense	19	3	6	10	21	32	15
Sport Recife	19	3	4	12	24	37	13

CHILE

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
League stage

July 22: Palestino 0 Univ de Chile 0.
July 23: Union Espanola 0 Everton 1.
July 25: Audax Italiano 2 Palestino 2; Univ de Concepcion 1 Colo Colo 3.
July 26: Santiago Morning 3 Nublense 1; Curico Unido 1 Huachipato 0; Rangers 2 O'Higgins 0; Municipal 1 Everton 2; Cobreloa 0 Univ de Chile 3; Union Espanola 1 Cobresal 0.
July 27: Univ Catolica 2 Dep La Serena 0.
July 31: O'Higgins 0 Univ de Concepcion 2.
Aug 1: Huachipato 0 Santiago Morning 1; Univ de Chile 2 Union Espanola 1; Palestino 1 Municipal 1.
Aug 2: Rangers 0 Everton 2; Colo Colo 0 Audax Italiano 1; Cobreloa 0 Cobresal 1; Nublense 0 Univ Catolica 0; Dep La Serena 2 Curico Unido 0.
Aug 7: Univ de Chile 1 Curico Unido 1.
Aug 8: Santiago Morning 2 Colo Colo 1; Palestino 2 Cobreloa 1; Huachipato 2 Dep La Serena 0; Univ Catolica 0 O'Higgins 0.
Aug 9: Municipal 3 Union Espanola 4; Cobresal 2 Rangers 0; Everton 1 Nublense 0; Audax Italiano 2 Univ de Concepcion 1.
Aug 15: Univ de Concepcion 2 Santiago Morning 1; Municipal 0 Univ de Chile 2.
Aug 16: Dep La Serena 4 Cobreloa 2; Colo Colo 3 Rangers 0; Curico Unido 2 Palestino 1; Cobresal 0 Nublense 0; Univ Catolica 3 Huachipato 1.

CHILE – CLOSING – LEAGUE STAGE	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Audax Italiano	5	4	1	0	8	4	13
Univ Catolica	6	3	3	0	8	2	12
Everton	5	4	0	1	6	2	12
Univ de Chile	6	3	2	1	11	7	11
Colo Colo	6	3	1	2	10	6	10
Dep La Serena	6	3	0	3	9	8	9
U Espanola	5	3	0	2	8	7	9
Palestino	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Curico Unido	6	2	3	1	6	6	9
U Concepcion	6	3	0	3	9	10	9
S Morning	6	3	0	3	7	8	9
Cobresal	6	2	2	2	4	4	8
Huachipato	6	2	0	4	8	9	6
Cobreloa	6	2	0	4	8	11	6
Rangers	6	2	0	4	7	12	6
O'Higgins	5	1	1	3	2	5	4
Nublense	6	0	2	4	3	8	2
Municipal	6	0	2	4	6	12	2

COLOMBIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP
Regular season

July 24: Once Caldas 0 America 0.
July 25: At Huila 2 Indep Santa Fe 1; Dep Cali 2 Pereira 1.
July 26: Cartagena 1 Indep Medellin 3; Dep Pasto 1 La Equidad 1; Cucuta 2 Quindio 0; Chico 4 Envigado 2; At Nacional 2 At Junior 1; Millonarios 0 Tolima 2.
Aug 1: La Equidad 2 Dep Cali 2; Quindio 0 At Nacional 1; Millonarios 1 At Huila 1.
Aug 2: Envigado 2 Indep Santa Fe 3; Indep Medellin 1 Chico 0; Pereira 1 Cartagena 1; At Junior 4 Once Caldas 2; Tolima 1 Cucuta 1; America 1 Dep Pasto 1.
Aug 8: Cucuta 0 Millonarios 1; Indep Santa Fe 2 Indep Medellin 1; Chico 0 Pereira 0.
Aug 9: At Huila 3 Envigado 2; Cartagena 2 La Equidad 2; Dep Pasto 1 At Junior 0; Once Caldas 2 Quindio 0; At Nacional 2 Tolima 2; Dep Cali 3 America 2.
Aug 15: America 0 Cartagena 1; Millonarios 1 At Nacional 1; Indep Medellin 4 Envigado 2.
Aug 16: Cucuta 1 At Huila 2; Tolima 2 Once Caldas 1; Quindio 2 Dep Pasto 1; At Junior 5 Dep Cali 2; La Equidad 1 Chico 1; Pereira 0 Indep Santa Fe 0.

COLOMBIA – CLOSING – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
At Huila	6	5	1	0	12	7	16
Ind Medellin	6	4	0	2	11	7	12
Ind Santa Fe	6	3	1	2	10	8	10
At Nacional	6	2	4	0	9	7	10
At Junior	6	3	0	3	12	10	9
Millonarios	6	2	3	1	7	6	9
Cartagena	6	2	3	1	8	8	9
La Equidad	6	1	5	0	9	8	8
Tolima	6	2	2	2	8	9	8
Dep Cali	6	2	2	2	11	13	8
Dep Pasto	6	2	2	2	6	8	8
Once Caldas	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Quindio	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Pereira	6	1	3	2	5	4	6
Cucuta	6	1	2	3	5	6	5
Chico	6	1	2	3	9	11	5
America	6	0	4	2	6	8	4
Envigado	6	0	2	4	12	18	2

ECUADOR

2nd stage

July 24: Dep Cuenca 1 El Nacional 0.
July 25: Espoli 1 Olmedo 2.
July 26: Macara 3 LDU Portoviejo 0; Dep Quito 1 Emelec 0; Manta 3 Tecnico Univ 1.
Aug 1: Tecnico Univ 0 Emelec 2; Barcelona 3 Macara 1; Espoli 0 Dep Quito 1.
Aug 2: LDU Quito 1 El Nacional 0; LDU Portoviejo 1 Dep Cuenca 0; Olmedo 1 Manta 1.
Aug 5: Barcelona 1 LDU Quito 1.
Aug 7: Dep Cuenca 0 Olmedo 0; El Nacional 4 Espoli 0; Tecnico Univ 0 Macara 2.
Aug 8: LDU Portoviejo 0 Manta 0.
Aug 15: Dep Quito 1 Tecnico Univ 2.
Aug 16: Dep Cuenca 2 Barcelona 1; Macara 0 LDU Quito 2; El Nacional 3 LDU Portoviejo 0; Emelec 2 Olmedo 1; Manta 2 Espoli 1.

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE – GROUP 1	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
El Nacional	5	3	0	2	8	2	9
LDU Quito	4	2	2	0	6	3	8
Dep Cuenca	5	2	2	1	5	4	8
LDU P'viejo	5	2	1	2	3	6	7
Macara	5	2	0	3	6	6	6
Barcelona	4	1	1	2	5	6	4

ECUADOR – 2ND STAGE – GROUP 2	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manta	5	2	3	0	7	4	9
Dep Quito	4	3	0	1	5	2	9
Emelec	4	2	1	1	5	3	7
Olmedo	5	1	2	2	4	6	5
Espoli	5	1	0	4	4	10	3
Tecnico Univ	5	1	0	4	4	10	3

PARAGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

July 25: Tacuary 0 Olimpia 1.
July 26: 2 de Mayo 0 Guarani 1; 3 de Febrero 1 12 de Octubre 0; Rubio Nu 2 Sportivo Luqueno 1; Sol de America 1 Libertad 3; Nacional 2 Cerro Porteno 0.
Aug 2: Guarani 1 Nacional 0; 2 de Mayo 1 3 de Febrero 2; Sportivo Luqueno 3 12 de Octubre 1; Olimpia 2 Sol de America 0; Libertad 0 Rubio Nu 0; Cerro Porteno 1 Tacuary 1.
Aug 7: Nacional 0 2 de Mayo 0; 12 de Octubre 0 Libertad 2.
Aug 8: Tacuary 1 Guarani 0; Sol de America 1 Cerro Porteno 1.
Aug 9: 3 de Febrero 0 Sportivo Luqueno 0; Rubio Nu 1 Olimpia 0.
Aug 14: 2 de Mayo 5 Tacuary 0.
Aug 15: Guarani 0 Sol de America 0.
Aug 16: Cerro Porteno 1 Rubio Nu 1; Libertad 2 Sportivo Luqueno 0; Nacional 1 3 de Febrero 1; Olimpia 1 12 de Octubre 0.

PARAGUAY – CLOSING	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Libertad	4	3	1	0	7	1	10
Olimpia	4	3	0	1	4	1	9
3 de Febrero	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Rubio Nu	4	2	2	0	4	2	8
Guarani	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Nacional	4	1	2	1	3	2	5
2 de Mayo	4	1	1	2	6	3	4
S Luqueno	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Tacuary	4	1	1	2	2	7	4
Cerro Porteno	4	0	3	1	3	5	3
Sol America	4	0	2	2	2	6	2
12 de Octubre	4	0	0	4	1	7	0

PERU

Regular season

July 25: Inti Gas 2 Colegio Nacional 0; Alianza Atletico 3 Total Chalaco 0; Cesar Vallejo 2 Jose Galvez 0; Universidad SMP 2 Sport Ancash 1; Coronel Bolognesi 2 Sporting Cristal 2; Universitario 0 Juan Aurich 1.
July 26: Cienciano 0 Alianza Lima 2; Melgar 1 Huancayo 0.
July 29: Huancayo 0 Total Chalaco 0; Cesar Vallejo 2 Inti Gas 1; Melgar 2 Alianza Atletico 1; Juan Aurich 3 Sport Ancash 2; Universitario 1 Universidad SMP 0; Coronel Bolognesi 0 Cienciano 0; Sporting Cristal 0 Alianza Lima 1; Jose Galvez 2 Colegio Nacional 1.
Aug 1: Colegio Nacional 1 Universitario 0; Universidad SMP 2 Sporting Cristal 2.
Aug 2: Sport Ancash 2 Melgar 2; Cienciano 5 Juan Aurich 1; Alianza Atletico 2 Jose Galvez 1; Inti Gas 2 Huancayo 3; Alianza Lima 1 Cesar Vallejo 1.
Aug 6: Inti Gas 1 Universidad SMP 1; Colegio Nacional 2 Sport Ancash 0; Sporting Cristal 2 Jose Galvez 0.
Aug 9: Juan Aurich 3 Huancayo 1; Coronel Bolognesi 2 Cesar Vallejo 2; Alianza Atletico 1 Cienciano 1; Universitario 1 Melgar 0; Total Chalaco 2 Alianza Lima 2.
Aug 15: Jose Galvez 1 Coronel Bolognesi 0; Universidad SMP 2 Total Chalaco 0; Sport Ancash 2 Inti Gas 0; Cesar Vallejo 3 Juan Aurich 3; Alianza Lima 0 Alianza Atletico 0.
Aug 16: Huancayo 0 Universitario 0; Melgar 1 Sporting Cristal 0; Cienciano 2 Colegio Nacional 1.

PERU – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Universitario	27	14	8	5	35	20	50
Juan Aurich	27	13	10	4	40	29	49
Al Lima	27	13	6	8	33	27	45
Univ SMP*	27	12	9	6	44	33	44
Huancayo	27	13	5	9	37	28	44
Cesar Vallejo	27	11	8	8	37	31	41
Melgar	27	11	7	9	32	34	40
Inti Gas	27	10	8	9	32	27	38
Jose Galvez	27	11	5	11	27	32	38
Cienciano	27	9	10	8	37	35	37
S Cristal	27	10	6	11	49	34	36
Total Chalaco	26	9	8	9	36	33	35
Al Atletico	27	7	8	12	27	37	29
Colegio	27	8	3	16	22	37	27
Sport Ancash	27	4	6	17	21	48	18
C Bolognesi	26	2	9	15	20	47	15

*1pt deducted

MEXICO

Rivarola winning start

Guillermo Rivarola began his career as Pachuca coach with a 3-2 win against Tecos UAG in the opening championship.

Christian Gimenez scored the winning goal from the penalty spot in the 65th minute. Juan Carlos Cacho, who is on loan from Pumas UNAM, and Damian Alvarez also scored for Pachuca.

USA

Wizards lose again

Kansas City Wizards sacked coach Curt Onalfo and his assistant Kris Kelderman after the 6-0 defeat to Dallas. However, interim coach Peter Vermes' first outing ended in disappointment as Chicago Fire won 2-0 in Kansas.

Columbus Crew beat Dallas 2-0 to record their fifth straight win.

Dumped...Onalfo

BOTSWANA

Gaborone win title

Gaborone United beat second-place Centre Chiefs 1-0 on the final day of the season to win the league championship for the first time in almost two decades.

Wellington Maposa scored the game's only goal, while Moemedi Moatlhaping missed a penalty for defending champions Chiefs.

IRAN

Karimi on the move

Former Bayern Munich striker Ali Karimi has joined promoted Steel Azin. Last season's first division winners have also signed former Kaiserslautern midfielder Fereydoon Zandi.

JAPAN

JEF appoint Ejiri

Atsuhiko Ejiri has replaced

URUGUAY

OVERALL CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF

Winners of opening champions-closing champions play-off (Nacional) v club with most aggregate league points over whole season (Defensor)

Best of three legs

1st leg

July 12
Defensor 1 (Pintos 66)
Nacional 2 (Coates 78, Biscayzacu 87)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** Vazquez
Sent off: Silva (Defensor) 45min; Medina (Nacional) 45min

2nd leg

July 15
Nacional 2 (Victorino 25, Lodeiro 86)
Defensor 1 (Navarro 60)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** Larrionda

VENEZUELA

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

Aug 9: El Vigia 2 Monagas 2; Lara* 2 Mineros 0; Centro Italo 2 Yaracuyanos 3; Zulia 0 Esppor 1; Zamora 0 Italia 2; Tachira 3 Estudiantes 0; Anzoategui 1 Carabobo 0.
Aug 10: Aragua 0 Trujillanos 1.
Aug 18: Mineros 1 El Vigia 0; Monagas 2 Aragua 2; Trujillanos 1 Caracas 1; Llaneros 0 Centro Italo 0; Lara 1 Zamora 1; Italia 2 Zulia 0; Esppor 3 Anzoategui 2; Carabobo 0 Tachira 0; Estudiantes 1 Yaracuyanos 2.
**Formerly known as Guaros*

VENEZUELA – OPENING

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Italia	2	2	0	0	4	0	6
Yaracuyanos	2	2	0	0	5	3	6
Esppor	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Tachira	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Lara	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Trujillanos	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Anzoategui	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Mineros	2	1	0	1	1	2	3
Monagas	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Caracas	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Llaneros	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Aragua	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Centro Italo	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
El Vigia	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Carabobo	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Zamora	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Zulia	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Estudiantes	2	0	0	2	1	5	0

CENTRAL & NORTH AMERICA

CONCACAF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary round

1st legs - July 28-30; 2nd legs - August 4-6
DC United (USA) v Luis Angel Firpo (EIS)*
1-1, 1-1 (agg 2-2; DC United 5-4 on pens)
Heredíano (CR) v Cruz Azul (Mex)
2-6, 0-0 (agg 2-6)
Liberia (CR) v Real Espana (Hnd)
3-0, 0-6 (agg 3-6)
Olimpia (Hnd) v Arabe Unido (Pan)
2-1, 0-1 (agg 2-2; Arabe Unido on away goals)
Pachuca (Mex) v Jalapa (Gtm)
3-0, 7-1 (agg 10-1)
San Francisco (Pan) v San Juan Jabloteh (T&T)
2-0, 0-3 (agg 2-3)
Toronto (Can) v Puerto Rico Islanders (PR)
0-1, 0-0 (agg 0-1)
W Connection (T&T) v New York Red Bulls (USA)
2-2, 2-1 (agg 4-3)
**Luis Angel Firpo replaced fellow Salvadoran team Chalatenango, who failed to meet tournament requirements by not returning a signed participation agreement*

Group stage draw

Group A: Arabe Unido, Houston Dynamo (USA), Metapan (EIS), Pachuca.
Group B: DC United, Marathon (Hnd), San Juan Jabloteh, Toluca (Mex).
Group C: Columbus Crew (USA), Cruz Azul, Puerto Rico Islanders, Saprissa (CR).
Group D: Comunicaciones (Gtm), Pumas UNAM (Mex), Real Espana, W Connection.

Matchdays: Aug 18-20; Aug 25-27; Sep 15-17; Sep 22-24; Sep 29-Oct 1; Oct 20-22

Top two in each group qualify for quarter-finals

MEXICO

OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP

July 25: Tecos 2 Pachuca 3.
July 26: Cruz Azul 0 Jaguares 2; Indios 0 Monterrey 0; Tigres 1 Puebla 1; Atlas 1 Pumas 0; Toluca 4 Guadalajara 3; Morelia 1 Santos 1.
July 29: San Luis 1 America 1.
Aug 1: Jaguares 0 Toluca 2; Monterrey 3 Atlas 0; Guadalajara 1 Tigres 3; Pachuca 3 Queretaro 1.
Aug 2: Puebla 1 Tecos 1; Pumas 0 Cruz Azul 3; America 1 Morelia 2; Santos 1 Indios 0.
Aug 8: Cruz Azul 2 Monterrey 0; Queretaro 1 Puebla 1; Indios 0 America 1; Atlas 2 Santos 1; Atlante 0 Pachuca 2.
Aug 9: Tigres 0 Jaguares 1; Morelia 2 San Luis 1; Toluca 3 Pumas 0.
Aug 15: Jaguares 0 Tecos 1; Monterrey 1 Toluca 0; Guadalajara 2 Queretaro 0; San Luis 3 Pachuca 0.
Aug 16: Pumas 1 Tigres 2; Puebla 1 Atlante 0; Morelia 5 Indios 0; America 2 Atlas 1; Santos 3 Cruz Azul 2.

MEXICO – OPENING – GROUP 1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Toluca	4	3	0	1	9	4	9
Atlas	4	2	0	2	4	6	6
San Luis	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Guadalajara	3	1	0	2	6	7	3
Queretaro	3	0	1	2	2	6	1
Indios	4	0	1	3	0	7	1

MEXICO – OPENING – GROUP 2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Morelia	4	3	1	0	10	3	10
Pachuca	4	3	0	1	8	6	9
Monterrey	4	2	1	1	4	2	7
America	4	2	1	1	5	4	7
Puebla	4	1	3	0	4	3	6
Jaguares	4	2	0	2	3	3	6

MEXICO – OPENING – GROUP 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Tigres	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Santos	4	2	1	1	6	5	7
Cruz Azul	4	2	0	2	7	5	6
Tecos	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Atlante	2	0	0	2	0	3	0
Pumas	4	0	0	4	1	9	0

UNITED STATES

July 24: Salt Lake 4 Dallas 2.
July 25: Seattle 0 Chicago 0; Columbus 3 Toronto 2; Houston 0 New England 1; Kansas City 1 Los Angeles 1; Colorado 4 New York 0; San Jose 2 DC United 2.
Aug 1: New England 1 Toronto 1; Houston 4 DC United 3; Dallas 6 Kansas City 0; Chicago 1 Salt Lake 0; Colorado 0 Columbus 1.
Aug 2: San Jose 4 Seattle 0.
Aug 6: Dallas 1 Houston 0.
Aug 8: New England 1 Los Angeles 2; San Jose 0 Columbus 3; Salt Lake 1 Seattle 0; Colorado 4 Chivas 0.
Aug 9: Houston 3 Chicago 2.
Aug 15: Toronto 2 DC United 0; New York 0 Chivas 2; Columbus 2 Dallas 0; Salt Lake 0 Houston 0; Los Angeles 0 Seattle 2.
Aug 16: Kansas City 0 Chicago 2.

UNITED STATES – EASTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Columbus	22	10	9	3	34	24	39
Chicago	21	9	8	4	30	23	35
Toronto	21	8	6	7	30	31	30
DC United	21	6	10	5	34	34	28
New England	18	6	6	6	20	24	24
Kansas City	19	5	6	8	20	27	21
New York	22	2	4	16	16	39	10

UNITED STATES – WESTERN CONFERENCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Houston	23	11	6	6	30	20	39
Seattle	21	8	8	5	28	21	32
Los Angeles	21	7	10	4	25	23	31
Colorado	20	8	6	6	32	24	30
Chivas	19	9	3	7	21	19	30
Salt Lake	21	7	6	8	29	24	27
Dallas	21	6	5	10	29	32	23
San Jose	20	4	5	11	25	38	17

AFRICA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Group A
July 31: Al Hilal (Sud) 1 Zesco United (Zam) 0.
Aug 1: Kano Pillars (Nig) 3 Al Merreikh (Sud) 1.
Aug 14: Al Hilal 2 Kano Pillars 0.
Aug 15: Al Merreikh 2 Zesco United 3.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Al Hilal	3	2	1	0	3	0	7
Kano Pillars	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Zesco United	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Al Merreikh	3	0	1	2	3	6	1

Group B
Aug 1: Etoile Sahel (Tun) 2 TP Mazembe (DRC) 1.
Aug 2: Heartland (Nig) 3 Monomotapa (Zim) 1.
Aug 15: TP Mazembe 5 Monomotapa 0.
Aug 16: Heartland 3 Etoile Sahel 0.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
TP Mazembe	3	2	0	1	8	2	6
Heartland	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Etoile Sahel	3	1	0	2	3	6	3
Monomotapa	3	1	0	2	3	9	3

Remaining matchdays: Aug 28-30, Sep 11-13, Sep 18-20

Top two in each group qualify for semi-finals

CONFEDERATION CUP

Group A
Aug 2: AS Vita Club (DRC) 1 Santos (Ang) 0; ENPPI (Egy) 3 ES Setif (Alg) 4.
Aug 16: ENPPI 3 AS Vita Club 1; Santos 1 ES Setif 0.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
ES Setif	3	2	0	1	6	4	6
Santos	3	2	0	1	2	1	6
ENPPI	3	1	0	2	6	6	3
AS Vita Club	3	1	0	2	2	5	3

Group B
Aug 1: Bayelsa United (Nig) 1 Stade Malien (Mli) 2; Primeiro Agosto (Ang) 1 Haras Hedood (Egy) 0.
Aug 14: Haras Hedood 1 Stade Malien 1.
Aug 15: Bayelsa United 4 Primeiro Agosto 0.

CONFEDERATION CUP – GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Stade Malien	3	1	2	0	3	2	5
Haras Hedood	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
P Agosto	3	1	1	1	1	4	4
Bayelsa Utd	3	1	0	2	5	3	3

Remaining matchdays: Aug 28-30, Sep 11-13, Sep 18-20

Top two in each group qualify for semi-finals

EGYPT

Aug 6: Mansoura 2 Ismaili 2; Mokawloon 1 Jaish 1; Ahly 2 Mehalla 0.
Aug 7: Petrojet 3 Ittihad 1; Assyut 1 Gouna 1; Haras Hedood 1 Shorta 1; Entag Harby 2 Masry 0; ENPPI 1 Zamalek 3.

EGYPT

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Petrojet	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Zamalek	1	1	0	0	3	1	3
Ahly	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Entag Harby	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Ismaili	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Mansoura	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Assyut	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Gouna	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Haras Hedood	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Jaish	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Mokawloon	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Shorta	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
ENPPI	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Ittihad	1	0	0	1	1	3	0
Masry	1	0	0	1	0	2	0
Mehalla	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

New start...Karimi

ex-Hibernian and Aberdeen manager Alex Miller as coach of JEF, while Montenegro midfielder Igor Burzanovic has joined Nagoya Grampus from Buducnost Podgorica.

MALAYSIA

Selangor target four

Selangor have added the Super League to their Charity Shield and FA Cup titles, and will now go for an unprecedented quadruple when the Malaysia Cup begins in September.

SOUTH KOREA

Seoul sign Anderson ahead of quarter-final

FC Seoul have strengthened their squad in advance of their Asian Champions League quarter-final showdown against Qatari side Umm Salal by signing Brazilian striker Anderson from Turkish club Eskisehirspor.

The 26-year-old fills a gap left by the sale of international Lee Chung-yong to English club Bolton Wanderers.

International midfielder Kim Do-hoen has joined Suwon Bluewings from English club West Bromwich Albion for £360,000.

International midfielder Oh Beom-seok has left Russian side Krylia Sovetov to return home with Ulsan Hyundai.

Home again..Oh

SOUTH AFRICA

Aug 7: Maritzburg 1 SuperSport 1.
Aug 8: Swallows 0 Arrows 0; Cosmos 0 Platinum Stars 0; Chiefs 0 Santos 0; Sundowns 2 Aces 0.
Aug 9: AmaZulu 2 Wits 2; Celtic 2 Free State Stars 2; Ajax 0 Pirates 1.

SOUTH AFRICA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sundowns	1	1	0	0	2	0	3
Pirates	1	1	0	0	1	0	3
AmaZulu	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Celtic	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
FS Stars	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Wits	1	0	1	0	2	2	1
Maritzburg	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
SuperSport	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Arrows	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Chiefs	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Cosmos	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Platinum Stars	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Santos	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Swallows	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Ajax	1	0	0	1	0	1	0
Aces	1	0	0	1	0	2	0

TUNISIA

July 26: Esperance Tunis 1 Olympique 0; Hammam-Sousse 3 Hammam-Lif 2; Sfaxien 6 Kasserine 1; Etoile Sahel 0 Stade Tunisien 0; Bizertin 2 Monastir 2; Gafsa 0 Club Africain 0; Kairouanaise 1 Esperance Zarzis 0.
Aug 1: Club Africain 1 Kairouanaise 0.
Aug 2: Hammam-Sousse 0 Bizertin 1; Olympique 0 Sfaxien 0; Monastir 4 Gafsa 1; Kasserine 2 Hammam-Lif 1; Stade Tunisien 4 Esperance Tunis 2.
Aug 5: Esperance Zarzis 1 Etoile Sahel 3.
Aug 8: Esperance Tunis 4 Kasserine 0.
Aug 9: Kairouanaise 0 Stade Tunisien 1; Bizertin 1 Club Africain 0; Gafsa 1 Esperance Zarzis 1; Sfaxien 2 Hammam-Sousse 0; Etoile Sahel 3 Olympique 0; Hammam-Lif 0 Monastir 0.
Aug 15: Club Africain 1 Sfaxien 0.
Aug 16: Kasserine 0 Kairouanaise 1; Stade Tunisien 1 Bizertin 2; Olympique 0 Gafsa 0; Esperance Zarzis 2 Hammam-Lif 0; Monastir 1 Esperance Tunis 2.

TUNISIA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bizertin	4	3	1	0	6	3	10
Esperance T	4	3	0	1	9	5	9
Sfaxien	4	2	1	1	8	2	7
Etoile Sahel	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Stade Tunisien	4	2	1	1	6	4	7
Club Africain	4	2	1	1	2	1	7
Kairouanaise	4	2	0	2	2	2	6
Monastir	4	1	2	1	7	5	5
Esperance Z	4	1	1	2	4	5	4
Ham-Sousse	3	1	0	2	3	5	3
Gafsa	4	0	3	1	2	5	3
Kasserine	4	1	0	3	3	12	3
Olympique	4	0	2	2	0	4	2
Ham-Lif	4	0	1	3	3	7	1

ASIA

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Quarter-finals draw

Bunyodkor (Uzb) v Pohang Steelers (SKo)
Kawasaki Frontale (Jap) v Nagoya Grampus (Jap)
Pakhtakor (Uzb) v Al Ittihad (Sau)
Umm Salal (Qat) v Seoul (SKo)
1st legs - Sep 23/24; 2nd legs - Sep 30

AFC CUP

Quarter-finals draw

Al Karama (Syr) v Al Arabi (Kuw)
Chonburi (Tha) v Binh Duong (Vie)
Kuwait SC (Kuw) v Arbil (Irq)
Neftchi (Uzb) v South China (HK)
1st legs - Sep 15; 2nd legs - Sep 30

AUSTRALIA

Regular season

Aug 6: Melbourne 0 Central Coast 2.
Aug 7: Adelaide 1 Perth 0.
Aug 8: North Queensland 2 Sydney 3; Brisbane 1 Gold Coast 3.
Aug 9: Newcastle 3 Wellington 2.
Aug 14: Central Coast 1 Newcastle 1.
Aug 15: Gold Coast 5 North Queensland 0; Melbourne 3 Brisbane 3.
Aug 16: Wellington 2 Perth 1; Sydney 1 Adelaide 0.

AUSTRALIA – REGULAR	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gold Coast	2	2	0	0	8	1	6
Sydney	2	2	0	0	4	2	6
Central Coast	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Newcastle	2	1	1	0	4	3	4
Wellington	2	1	0	1	4	4	3
Adelaide	2	1	0	1	1	1	3
Brisbane	2	0	1	1	4	6	1
Melbourne	2	0	1	1	3	5	1
Perth	2	0	0	2	1	3	0
N Queensland	2	0	0	2	2	8	0

CHINA

Aug 2: Jiangsu 2 Shanghai 2; Changchun 1 Changsha 1; Qingdao 1 Hangzhou 1; Guangzhou 2 Henan 0; Dalian 1 Tianjin 1; Shenzhen 0 Shandong 0; Chengdu 2 Shaanxi 0; Chongqing 3 Beijing 2.
Aug 8: Guangzhou 6 Shenzhen 1; Henan 0 Dalian 0; Tianjin 0 Hangzhou 0; Qingdao 6 Chongqing 1; Changchun 0 Jiangsu 0; Shanghai 2 Chengdu 1.
Aug 9: Beijing 3 Changsha 0; Shaanxi 1 Shandong 2.

CHINA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Beijing	17	8	6	3	30	16	30
Shandong	17	7	8	2	19	15	29
Henan	17	7	6	4	15	12	27
Shanghai	17	7	5	5	23	16	26
Guangzhou	17	7	5	5	27	21	26
Changchun	17	7	5	5	20	17	26
Dalian	17	7	4	6	18	17	25
Tianjin	17	6	6	5	18	12	24
Jiangsu	17	6	6	5	18	14	24
Changsha	17	5	8	4	13	15	23
Hangzhou	17	6	4	7	19	20	22
Qingdao	17	4	7	6	21	22	19
Shaanxi	17	4	6	7	14	15	18
Chengdu	17	5	2	10	14	22	17
Shenzhen	17	4	4	9	14	31	16
Chongqing	17	2	6	9	12	30	12

IRAN

Aug 6: Rah-Ahan 2 Foolad 1; Mes 3 Persepolis 3.
Aug 7: Zob-Ahan 3 Saipa 0; Shahin 1 Malavan 1; Pas 0 Steel Azin 2; Peykan 0 Moghavemat 2; Saba 2 Teraktor Sazi 1; Esteghlal Ahvaz 1 AbooMoslem 0; Esteghlal Tehran 1 Sepahan 0.
Aug 14: Steel Azin 4 Saba 3; AbooMoslem 0 Pas 0; Saipa 1 Shahin 0; Malavan 2 Rah-Ahan 1; Persepolis 1 Esteghlal Ahvaz 1; Foolad 1 Peykan 1.
Aug 15: Teraktor Sazi 0 Zob-Ahan 0; Moghavemat 0 Esteghlal Tehran 0; Sepahan 3 Mes 0.

IRAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steel Azin	2	2	0	0	6	3	6
Zob-Ahan	2	1	1	0	3	0	4
Moghavemat	2	1	1	0	2	0	4
Malavan	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Esteghlal A	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Esteghlal T	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Sepahan	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Saba	2	1	0	1	5	5	3
Rah-Ahan	2	1	0	1	3	3	3
Saipa	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Persepolis	2	0	2	0	4	4	2
Foolad	2	0	1	1	2	3	1
Shahin	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Teraktor Sazi	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
AbooMoslem	2	0	1	1	0	1	1
Peykan	2	0	1	1	1	3	1
Pas	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Mes	2	0	1	1	3	6	1

JAPAN

July 25: Tokyo 0 Sanfrecce 0; Kashima 1 Kashiwa 1; Urawa 0 Nagoya 3; JEF 1 Shimizu 2; Gamba 1 Oita 0; Vissel 1 Omiya 2.
July 26: Albirex 1 Montedio 1; Jubilo 1 Yokohama 1; Kyoto 3 Kawasaki 1.
Aug 1: Kawasaki 2 Tokyo 1; Yokohama 3 Kyoto 0; Albirex 0 Omiya 0; Jubilo 3 JEF 2; Sanfrecce 1 Kashima 0; Oita 2 Nagoya 1.
Aug 2: Montedio 1 Gamba 1; Urawa 0 Shimizu 1; Kashiwa 0 Vissel 1.
Aug 15: Kyoto 1 Montedio 0; Kashima 1 Oita 0; Nagoya 0 Kawasaki 2; Gamba 1 Urawa 0; Vissel 0 Sanfrecce 0; JEF 0 Kashiwa 0.
Aug 16: Omiya 1 Jubilo 1; Tokyo 0 Yokohama 0; Shimizu 1 Albirex 1.

JAPAN	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kashima	21	14	5	2	31	14	47
Kawasaki	21	11	6	4	37	24	39
Albirex	21	9	9	3	33	20	36
Urawa	21	10	4	7	24	23	34
Gamba	21	10	3	8	35	27	33
Shimizu	21	8	9	4	31	25	33
Tokyo	21	10	3	8	29	25	33
Sanfrecce	21	8	7	6	34	26	31
Jubilo	21	8	5	8	32	35	29
Kyoto	21	8	4	9	24	26	28
Yokohama	21	6	8	7	27	23	26
Omiya	21	6	8	7	25	30	26
Nagoya	21	7	5	9	24	29	26
Montedio	21	6	6	9	25	26	24
Vissel	21	6	5	10	25	33	23
JEF	21	4	8	9	21	32	20
Kashiwa	21	3	8	10	22	41	17
Oita	21	3	1	17	15	35	10

SOUTH KOREA

July 25: Incheon 1 Chunnam 1; Jeju 1 Suwon 0; Pohang 3 Daegu 0; Busan 2 Gangwon 0.
July 26: Chonbuk 1 Ulsan 1; Daejeon 0 Gyeongnam 0.
Aug 1: Daegu 2 Daejeon 2; Gwangju 0 Busan 1; Ulsan 2 Pohang 2; Suwon 2 Seoul 0; Gyeongnam 0 Jeju 0.
Aug 2: Songnam 3 Chonbuk 1; Gangwon 3 Incheon 2.
Aug 15: Chunnam 4 Gangwon 1; Incheon 1 Gwangju 0; Jeju 0 Daegu 0; Daejeon 1 Ulsan 0; Pohang 1 Songnam 1; Busan 1 Suwon 1; Seoul 2 Gyeongnam 1.

SOUTH KOREA	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Seoul	18	11	3	4	31	17	36
Chonbuk	17	9	5	3	35	21	32
Pohang	18	7	9	2	30	21	30
Gwangju	18	9	2	7	24	17	29
Incheon	17	7	6	4	20	20	27
Chunnam	17	6	6	5	29	29	24
Jeju	18	6	6	6	16	20	24
Songnam	17	6	5	6	20	19	23
Gangwon	18	6	5	7	32	35	23
Busan	18	5	6	7	23	24	21
Suwon	18	5	6	7	15	18	21
Daejeon	18	4	8	6	17	22	20
Ulsan	18	4	7	7	20	22	19
Gyeongnam	18	2	10	6	12	20	16

FORTHCOMING FIXTURES

Asian hopefuls...Pohang Steelers

September 5/6
World Cup qualifiers
September 8/9
World Cup qualifiers
September 15
UEFA Champions League, group stage starts
September 19/20
African Champions League, final round of group games
September 23/24
Asian Champions League, quarter-finals 1st leg
September 24
Under-20 World Cup starts
September 30
Asian Champions League, quarter-finals 2nd leg

Famous Last Words

Who said what and why

"Bobby Robson is one of those personalities who never die"

Jose Mourinho pays homage to his former mentor

"We still know how to produce good players. But today's generation lack the mental energy, self-control and ability to withstand pressure"

French federation technical director Gerard Houllier bemoans the poor character of his nation's youngsters

"I am not one to ever abandon the ship"

Under-fire Diego Maradona refuses to accept his Argentina are holed below the waterline

"We will help him financially if need be"

Fiorentina captain Dario Dainelli says the *Viola* players will put their hands in their pockets to aid team-mate Adrian Mutu, who must pay Chelsea £14.65million for breach of contract after failing in an appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport

"Since he agreed to take on the Belgium job next year, our results have got worse and worse"

An official communiqué from Zenit St Petersburg explains the reason for the sacking of coach Dick Advocaat

"I needed two class attackers and they give me this Rosina"

Another nail in the Advocaat coffin as he takes exception to the club's signing of Torino winger Alessandro Rosina

"I'm lucky that my wife Truus is a football fan too"

Bayern Munich coach Louis Van Gaal reveals that taking home work is no problem for him

"It's worrying. We can't continue to let in two goals like this per game"

New Real Madrid coach Manuel Pellegrini is at pains to explain his side's susceptibility to high balls at the back

True Blue...Terry

"I'm totally committed to Chelsea and always have been...me leaving Chelsea was never a possibility"

John Terry makes his position clear. Eventually

"I want back the sum we were fined by UEFA"

Steaua Bucharest president Gigi Becali sues fans for the €50,000 the club had to pay when a racist banner was spotted at the ground during a Europa League tie against Ujpest FC

"We are looking for reform from top to bottom"

Peruvian players prepare to go on strike. They are demanding the implementation of a 40-point plan to shake up the structure of the game in Peru

"They're a small club with a small mentality. All they can talk about is Manchester United"

United boss Alex Ferguson on Manchester City

Whip-round...Dainelli

"We urge our fans to drink a lot of Welsh whisky as a form of disinfection. That should cure all symptoms of the disease"

The Russian FA's advice to fans travelling to a friendly against Wales on how best to guard against swine flu

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